16th Year of Publication

Weird Tales

25c

NOVEMBER

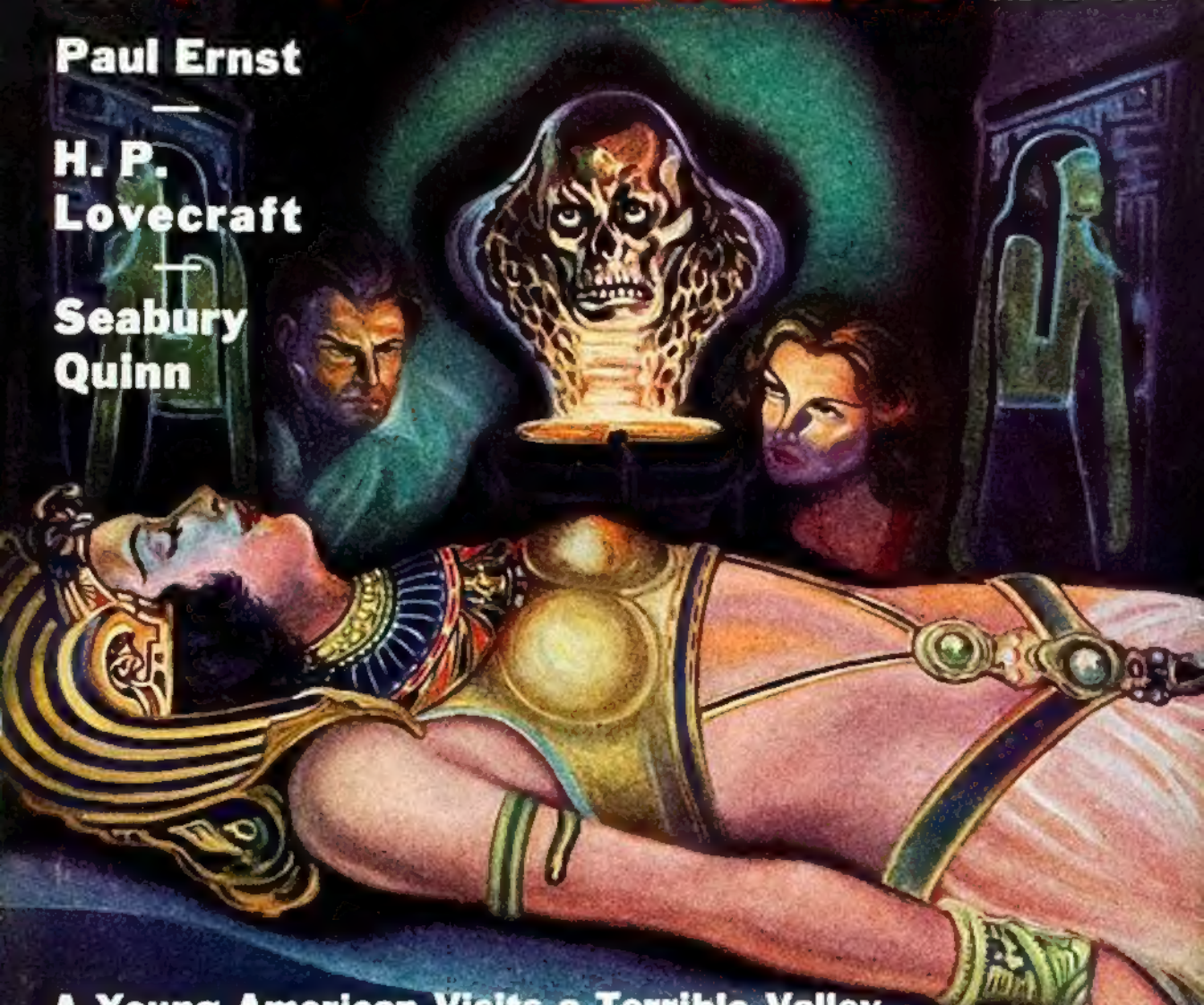
Paul Ernst

—

H. P. Lovecraft

—

Seabury Quinn



A Young American Visits a Terrible Valley

I FOUND CLEOPATRA

by

Thomas P. Kelley

Thousands turn to Listerine as science proves it CURES DANDRUFF

Clinical evidence that Listerine Antiseptic kills queer Pityrosporum ovale germ, that causes dandruff, starts wave of home treatments . . . letters pour in telling of rapid, complete cures

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"Two weeks after first using it my dandruff was gone."

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"Tried everything possible, until one day I used Listerine. The itching stopped at once. My hair has stopped falling out."

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76% of a group of dandruff sufferers at a New Jersey Clinic, who used the Listerine treatment twice daily, showed complete disappearance of, or marked improvement in, the symptoms within thirty days.

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Don't waste time on ordinary remedies that merely wash away dandruff symptoms temporarily. Start ridding your scalp of the dandruff germ with Listerine today.

And remember, like any other germ disease, dandruff is a stubborn malady requiring persistent treatment. Even after it has been cured, it is wise to guard against re-infection by occasional Listerine Antiseptic massages at regular intervals.

LAMBERT PHARMACAL COMPANY, *St. Louis, Mo.*

Cut this out

THE TREATMENT

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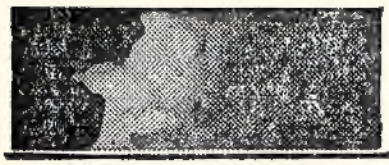
P. S. *Listerine, which has been discovered to be such an excellent germicidal treatment for dandruff, is the same Listerine Antiseptic which has been used as a mouth wash and gargle for years.*

LISTERINE the PROVED treatment for DANDRUFF



Have You Had These

Strange Experiences

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Weird Tales

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Published monthly by Weird Tales, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N. Y. Application for second-class entry pending at the post office at New York, N. Y. Single copies, 25 cents. *Subscription rates:* One year in the United States and possessions, Cuba, Mexico, South America, Spain, $2.50; Canada, $2.75; elsewhere, $3.00. English Office: Charles Lavell, 13, Serjeants' Inn, Fleet Street, E.S.4, London. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts, although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession. The contents of this magazine are fully protected by copyright and must not be reproduced either wholly or in part without permission from the publishers.
FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

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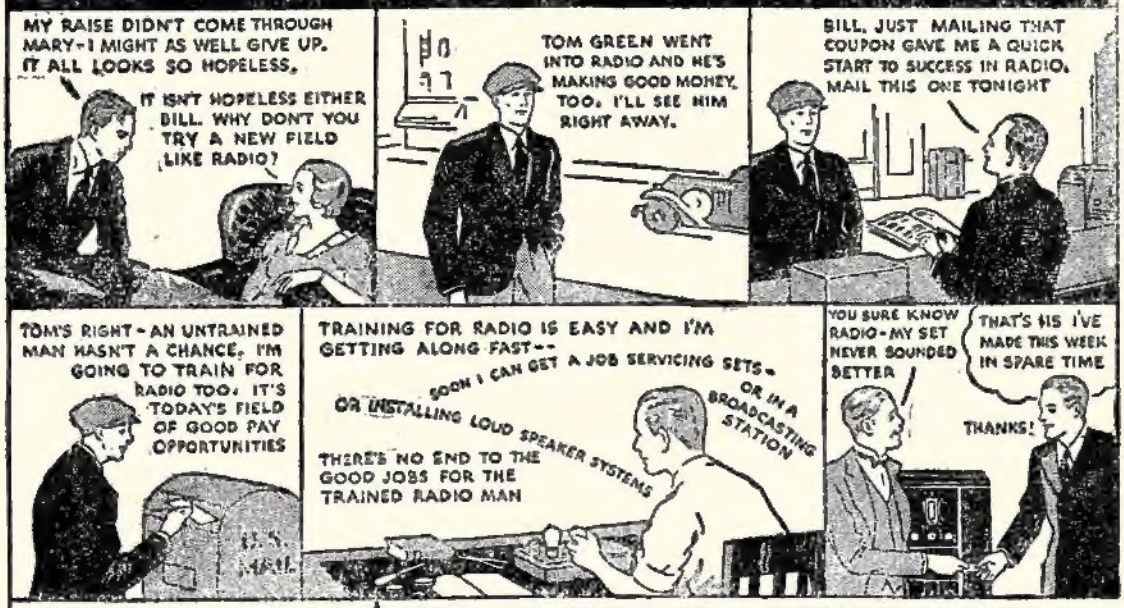
WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

HE THOUGHT HE WAS LICKED—THEN A TIP GOT BILL A GOOD JOB!



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28x5.25-18	2.90	1.15
29x5.25-19	2.95	1.15
30x5.25-20	2.95	1.15
31x5.25-21	2.95	1.15
6.50-17	3.35	1.15
29x5.50-19	3.35	1.15
30x5.50-20	3.35	1.15
6.00-18	3.75	1.45
6.00-17	3.40	1.15
29x5.50-18	3.40	1.15
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33x4½	3.35	1.15
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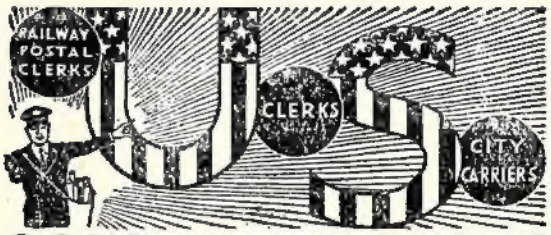

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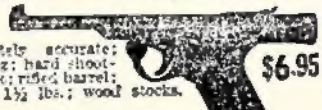

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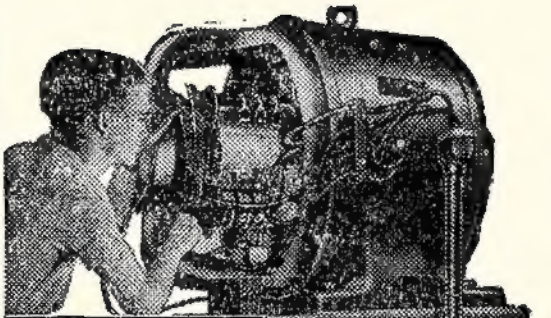

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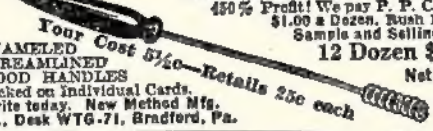

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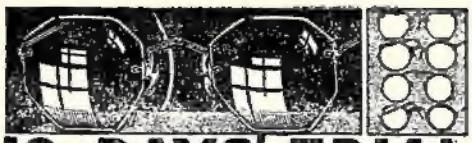

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I Found Cleopatra

By THOMAS P. KELLEY

A glamorous weird tale of romance and mystery, of the almost incredible fate that befell a young American who sought the tomb of the famous Egyptian Queen—by the author of "The Last Pharaoh"

1. The Midnight Lady

FAR beyond the last outpost, deep in the heart of the great Sahara, surrounded by towering peaks, lies the weird and terrible valley that guards the Tree of Life. No man knows the hidden vale that burns as the sun hangs high. No man hears its sobbing winds, or sees the forms that howl to the stars in the eery hours of darkness. Just at the base of the southern

slope is the cairn that hides the lonely grave. Close beside it stand the ruins of a long-forgotten temple, erected in those distant days when the world itself was young!

Even at the beginning I warn you that you will not believe this strangest of stories. The human mind is quick to doubt the bizarre, and this tale takes us far beyond the borders of sanity. Indeed, have I not time and again tried to delude myself that it all has been some horrible dream, and I the unfortunate victim?

It is then those memories come to prove its grim reality. From revery's mists are wafted flashing eyes and taunting laughter. In dreams I flee through miles of sand, and ride once more with humans who fought and lived in the dawning. And in those long and slumber-tossed moments I watch the charges of a barbaric horde, and see again the tortures of a slender, dark-eyed maid.

It is then I awake to realize Sahara's secrets now are mine, and that I alone of all men know the tree whose forbidden fruit was plucked by Eve and Adam!

But, to begin at the beginning: Strangely enough, it was the last bequest of my father that brought around the entire adventure. The great depression had made no exception of the house of O'Hara, and the spring of 1934 saw the once comfortable fortune of my sire reduced to almost nothing. That, together with the death of my mother two years earlier, I will ever believe to have been primary in the demise that left me, Brian O'Hara, alone to carry on with the law practise that had been our joint profession. In all probability I would have shortly resumed practise but for that strange and ancient parchment, so long a family possession.

The manner in which this had come to us was never quite made clear, though legend had it that back in Napoleonic days my great-great-grandfather, a dashing adventurer and soldier of fortune, had landed at a little settlement near Dakar, on the West African coast.

From here the tale grows hazy; one version being that the young Irishman stole the scroll from some temple, and had only managed to gain the ship with a howling horde at his heels. Another, and probably the most likely story, told of how it had been bought from some half-naked chief who claimed to have found it in the ruins of an old monastery, far inland.

However, whether one or both can be doubted, the fact remains that the new owner had promptly tossed his possession into a strong-box, where it remained, half forgotten with the passing of the years. Only recently—some six months past—had an effort been made to translate it, and with the aid of an archeologist associate I was able to learn its contents; namely, that the narrator, Kharmes the Egyptian, had been an officer of high rank in his country's army, two thousand years ago.

Ever in those musty pages one read of the growing power of Rome, as well as the crumbling strength of the Ptolemys; of countless clashes of the light-armed tribes with clanking legions of the Cæsars. It mentioned also a brief history of the narrator, as well as the many loves and adventures of the dark-eyed Queen he served—of the defeat of Cleopatra at Actium, and triumphant entry of Octavius into conquered Alexandria.

It was here that the parchment turned to the bizarre, to tell how

Kharmes and four others had stolen to the tower of Isis Lochias in the dead of night, and received the heavy sarcophagus lowered to them from above; of the stealth with which they had slipped past the guarding sentinels, to reach at length the galley that waited on the moonlit Nile; then, at the command of the aged Baltarus, wise man and secret adviser of the Queen, of how the narrator had set sail in the great warship of a hundred slaves and fifty soldiers, to find a spot far beyond the Roman legions and known civilized world, that they might bury in a befitting manner "One who is but sleeping."

It told of how the galley had landed after months at sea—months of storm and winds that swept upon them as they followed the coast of a seemingly endless world of beasts and jungle; of how the ship's company had then deserted the galley, to travel inland for many days, penetrating ever farther into a strange country of sand, to come at last to a spot they all agreed as one no man had ever seen, concluding with the words:

"And so it was we came at last to the three mountains that towered to the sky. But it was not till Ra had sunk and risen many times that the tomb was dug deep, the sarcophagus we carried so long laid within, and the great boulder that guards its entrance brought into place. And then, when this was done, and the orders of the Master carried out, the soldiers killed the slaves we had brought with us so that no loose tongue should tell the Romans our great secret.

"Here we rested many days. Then, with strength returned to our limbs, the little band took up the long march that lay between us and the galley we had left on the shore of the great sea. But the frown of Osiris was upon us, and the soldiers of Egypt were never again to know the palms and temples of the Motherland. One by one they fell before the rays of Ra, until of all that company I alone was left to continue on over the sands that stretched away to the sky.

"And for long I struggled, but at length the thirst and heat proved stronger, so that I too fell, to await my death. But Isis in her goodness remembered my suffering, and sent a caravan of bearded men, who tended and made easy my last hours.

"But I knew Anubis hovered near, and so have written this record of my travels and made a drawing of those three strange peaks, marking well the one in whose tip rests our burden, for though unable to return to the homeland, fate may one day send this parchment to the waiting Baltarus, and he will know where lies the treasure and sarcophagus of the 'One who is but sleeping.' The one who in my last hours I believe to be our great Queen —Cleopatra!"

At the bottom of the scroll was the drawing of three cone-shaped mountains, the central peak rising above the rest, and marked with a crude X.

INCREDIBLE? Well, perhaps; but the parchment was destined to know obscurity no longer. The archeologist who translated it was writing a series of articles at the time, and frequently mentioned its contents, as well as his own opinion as to its falsity. The learned man had added that the real mummy of Cleopatra was known to have been brought from Egypt to Paris by Napoleon, and at present the alleged remains of that famed Queen were said to be buried in the gardens of the French National Library, near the Rue Vivienne.

Despite the contents of the scroll the latter account did seem more probable, and so it was a decided surprise when some four weeks later I received a phone call from New York, and heard the soft voice of one Manuel De Costa asking if I might be interested in selling both the parchment and the crude map it contained.

But by this time I had been caught by the adventure that old scroll promised, and though unable to finance an expedition, had decided to throw in my lot with one who could—he to supply the needed funds, while I furnished the chart and information that would guide us to the tomb—if, indeed, a tomb there was. The summary of the conversation was that I agreed to meet the soft-spoken Spaniard at the Lexington-Arms Hotel in New York, three days later.

The night before the meeting found me at the hotel eager for the unknown. I had gone out earlier in the evening, so that it must have been well on to midnight when I returned to my room, and in smoking-jacket and slippers stood looking from the window, preparatory to retiring.

Far below the flash and glimmer of countless lights stretched away for miles.

Dimly I realized that only a few centuries ago a virgin forest had sheltered furry, running creatures, where now rose this thunderous city. It had come to me, also, that the famed Queen for whose mummy I might so soon be searching had played with the hearts of men when our own nation had been a savage wilderness.

And now from out of the night rose the blaring horns and rumbling of the Twentieth Century, while she whose memory dimmed all else had lain two thousand years in death. It was the slight creaking of the door I had failed to lock that cut short my reveries and wheeled me in my tracks.

There, standing in the doorway, was a woman of such breath-taking beauty as to appear almost ethereal, a tall, dark-eyed enchantress, whose satin gown revealed the shapely outlines of her body. Diamonds that flashed from her hands and wrists represented several fortunes, while an open cloak of ermine must have cost a fortune.

"You will be so good as to pardon this intrusion. I had to come to you unannounced, as I fear I have been followed."

THE voice was soft and musical, and though she had closed the door behind her in a manner that suggested caution, there was no sign of fear in those long-lashed eyes. Indeed, there was something in the entire bearing of this exotic beauty that was an open challenge to danger.

I must have looked my surprise. "You have been followed?"

"It is only too possible. I had my driver bring me here in such a roundabout manner that we must have covered half the city, but there was no alternative. The spies of 'The Wolf' are everywhere, and one meets trickery with trickery."

"But surely there is something I can do."

My midnight visitor looked long at me before she spoke.

"There are several things you could do, Mr. O'Hara," she replied at last; "several things that might not only enrich yourself, but aid me as well. No, no, do not question; only listen and answer. Yes, I know your name and who you are. But tell me, is it true that you have in your possession the scroll said to be that of Kharmes, officer of the

guard to Egypt's last Ptolemaic Queen?"

"Yes, that is true."

A wild joy leaped to her eyes. "Then there is still time," she murmured half to herself.

"But is it not also true that Manuel De Costa has arranged to meet you here on the morrow to discuss plans for organizing an expedition to search for the tomb your parchment mentions?" she demanded an instant later.

It was the first question that surprised me most. I knew the Egyptian, Kharmes, had been an army man of some sort, but as to his exact station, I was in doubt. How this information could have been gained was beyond me, and so it was but mutely that I nodded an answer.

A reading-table was all that separated us. Now, at my silent affirmation, two bejeweled hands were leaned upon its surface, and I could see a real intensity in her eyes.

"You must not go. No; you must not go with him. To accompany that man to the Sahara is to sign your own death warrant. Oh I know him of old, and speak only the truth when I tell you that from Igidi's sands to the Libyan desert, Manuel De Costa is known as 'The Wolf of the Sahara.' Tales of his cruelty are told by the Arabs around the campfire—tales of death and tortures so fiendish that to repeat them would pollute the very air around us.

"It is not hard to imagine your fate once he and his followers have put a hundred miles between them and the coast, not difficult to foretell the lot of one that can be but similar to the many others whose bones now dot the Sahara. Perhaps they may bide their time. It is even possible they will wait till your chart has guided them to the very tomb they seek. But once you have served their purpose and ceased to be of importance, the hours will be few before a strangler's noose is dropped around your neck, or a thin blade buried into your heart."

The last words were almost a whisper.

"But why do you warn me?" I asked. "Why have you come here at all?"

"To offer you the help and funds of one whose resources are unlimited; to offer you the guidance of one who knows every vale and hillock in the Sahara as no other living human—myself."

"You!"

"Is it as astounding as all that?" she demanded. "Does it so surprise you that I should know that dreary world of sand?"

Then, as I hesitated: "Yes, I assure you of my ability to lead you to the tomb your parchment mentions, though it be in the very heart of the Hot Lands. Meet me in Dakar three weeks from now, and I will prove it. Believe me when I tell you it is the one sane course to follow. Once you have landed you can show me the scroll, and be taken by the most direct route to that forgotten vault and the treasures that lie waiting."

She paused, then added slowly: "Treasures that I promise will be given to you alone."

THERE was more — much more — that might have been said in the next few minutes, but I cannot recall it. The mystery of it all, the sudden appearance of this strange beauty, had so bewildered my mind, I could neither act nor think clearly.

True, I had agreed to meet another on the morrow, but that was before I had heard the soft voice of The Midnight Lady. It was as though a sudden

mist had risen to dim all promises made in the past. All I know, all that perhaps I shall ever know, was that presently I found myself mumbling affirmations and agreeing to things of which I knew nothing, as I held the heavy ring she had handed me.

"I must hasten," she was saying presently. "Time passes and there is much to be done ere the dawning. It is agreed, then, that nine days hence you will board the *Drockland* for Tangier, from which port you can secure passage for Dakar. That ring"—and she nodded to the strange band I held—"will be your only credentials. Guard it well, therefore, and wear it on your arrival, as there will be one watching for it, one who will make himself known, and fly you inland to where I and a score of picked fighting-men will be waiting. Do you follow me?"

"Yes," I answered slowly. "Yes, I think I understand."

"I will not attempt to deceive you, Mr. O'Hara. From this moment on you are a marked man. It is a powerful enemy we oppose, one who will stop at nothing to reach that tomb before us. As his hirelings have found me, so they will also seek you out. A thousand dangers lie between you and Dakar, but you must not fail me. Once inland we will be in my own territory, and can resort to methods that may surprise even the wily Wolf himself."

A thick roll of currency had been tossed on the table. Now, at her last words, she turned as though the interview was over.

"But—but wait!" I called. "Your visit—it is all so strange. In the morning I shall believe I dreamed it."

"The ring should prove the contrary."

"Then—well, just one more question," I insisted, hardly knowing what to say. "You have said if a treasure is found I may keep it. Why should you go through all this expense and hardship for nothing? You certainly show a remarkable interest in a Queen dead two thousand years."

The bejeweled beauty had hurried to the door, and now stood in the open frame watching me as one might the awkward actions of a child. Far below us came the rumble of the great city and flashing of its countless lights. At my last words, however, for the first time that night a faint smile lit those wondrous features.

"A remarkable interest in Cleopatra? Well, perhaps, yes. You see, Mr. O'Hara—that is I—er——"

The Midnight Lady paused in uncertainty. For an instant two dark eyes looked strangely at me. Then the door was swiftly shut, but before it had been fully closed I made out those three whispered words:

"I knew her!"

2. *Guns and Gangsters*

It was late the following afternoon when I met the second of the three strange humans who were destined to play such outstanding rôles in my life.

Though I had been warned of Manuel De Costa, I knew that even without that warning I would have felt the sudden dislike for the polished stranger entering the room; a tall, smirking human, whose swarthy features seemed devoid of any redeeming quality. One felt, even at that first glimpse of him, that here was one who was bad to the marrow, his smile a sneer, his laugh a mockery.

"A little late, *Señor,* a few short hours, perhaps?" The parted lips flashed a row of white teeth. "Ah, well,

I can surely be excused when one considers the matter that brings us together has been centuries in the making."

"Nearly twenty of them in all," I answered. "And yet it appears as though you were late by a matter of hours."

"Late?" he asked. "I do not understand."

"That another has been here before you."

There was a slight pause while the newcomer looked quizzical; then a smile of understanding lighted his sharp features. "Ah, of course, of course. Always do I find myself forgetting the strange humor of you Americans." He gave a short laugh as he added: "Surely, *Señor,* you are not going to tell me a wild tale of spirits and such things—that the ghost of some long-dead mummy, perhaps, has appeared to you and told how it would curse the rash mortal who dared disturb its bones?"

The hand that sought and found mine had the cold touch of a serpent.

"Hardly," I added. "No, I have always left that sort of thing to children and the Halloween party."

"A real live ghost, then? I am all interest, *Señor.*"

But I had decided to waste neither time nor words on Manuel De Costa. True, the situation was an awkward one, but in such cases frankness is sometimes the best weapon. Of course, there had been a previous arrangement with my visitor, but despite all this the fact remained I had sold both the parchment and my services to another. To come straight to the point and admit it was the logical thing to do. This I did in a few short sentences, made the more blunt, perhaps, by my dislike of the man.

While I spoke his dark eyes never left me.

"You—you jest, of course, *Señor?*" he had asked when I concluded.

"It would be a poor idea of humor—even the strange humor of an American."

"BUT—but no, Señor. No; you cannot do this. You dare not do this!" His former bearing of ease had changed to surprise, then anger. "You dare not sell the scroll!"

"You mean I have not the right to do as I please with my own parchment?"

"I mean you have promised it to me!" he cried. "That you have given your word, and the scroll now belongs to Manuel De Costa. It is the truth I speak—you dare not deny it. Was it not I who read of the discovery in far-off Hindustan, and journeyed halfway around the world to get it? Was it not I who spoke to you and mentioned that request, but three short days ago? Did I not——"

"One moment, Mr. De Costa," I broke in sharply. "There are parts of that little speech not 'according to Hoyle.' As to your call, I readily admit it, as well as my agreeing to meet you here. We were to discuss terms regarding the sale of my parchment, with you as the probable buyer. There was nothing said to the contrary of that, nor do I attempt to deny it now. But as for giving you my promise to sell the parchment, none knows better than you the falsity of that statement."

Manuel De Costa went white. For a long moment he glared at me, and when at last he did speak, the words were so low as to be almost inaudible.

"And what am I to understand by that?"

"Offhand, I would say anything you

like," I answered. "Each word was plain enough, and none of them over ten letters. But I am afraid the pleasure of this chat is causing me to neglect important duties elsewhere," I added; "so if you will pardon the abruptness, I will wish you good afternoon."

"You mean——"

"That the interview is over."

Manuel De Costa sprang to his feet. "There will be others!" he shouted in a voice that trembled with rage. "There will be others, I promise you! Do you think I will sit idly by while you make a fool of Manuel De Costa? That I, who have defied the highest, should know defeat from an upstart? Your crude manner might have been overlooked on the assumption of ignorance, but now that chance is lost forever by your defiance. If my name is unknown to the *Señor,* this effrontery has insured him good reason to remember it."

I was walking toward him as I answered: "Perhaps I have heard it mentioned. Who knows but the name might be known to me—infamously?"

Then before my surprised visitor could answer, I had bowed him from the room and shut the door in his face.

THE following nine days passed as a century while I waited the departure of the great ship that was to speed me to adventure and the unknown.

During that time there had been nothing to warn of the powerful enemy I had made, or the lengths to which he would go to strike at those who opposed him. It was as if the earth had opened and swallowed Manuel De Costa. This silence was not what I had expected. Inwardly I was certain there would be other calls—by phone at least—and was both surprised and pleased by their absence.

But it was soon to be shown that an enemy of Manuel De Costa's was never forgotten. The night previous to my departure I had returned from the theatre to find a note and driver waiting. The missive contained but a single line in a feminine hand, and asked that I accompany the bearer. Though unsigned I reasoned it could have come from none other than The Midnight Lady herself; though it had been my belief that at this moment that dark-eyed beauty was rapidly nearing the sandy edge of the great Sahara.

Of course it might mean trickery of some sort, yet——

There could be but one answer to such a message. In an instant I had got into the waiting car, and a moment later was being whisked through a broad thoroughfare of lights and roaring traffic.

I had been struck with the appearance of the driver from the first. He was not tall, but one of the broadest men I had ever seen. Now as he sat silently beside me, dodging the car in and out of the heavy night traffic with a skill that told of long practise, I was once more conscious of his great size.

Not that there was any reason why I should know alarm. Standing three inches over six feet, I held the heavyweight championship during my college years, and at one time had seriously considered the prize-ring as a profession. So possibly it was more an admiration for his physique than anything else that commanded my attention. I lay back in my seat as the car shot ahead through the heart of the great city, then on past what seemed endless miles of lights and smaller buildings. Several times I caught a glimpse of the river to our left, and once a far-flung glimmer I knew to be the outline of some bridge.

For a long half-hour we continued our journey. Not once did the man beside me attempt to break his silence. I saw the skyscrapers and busy thoroughfare change to the homes and quieter residential districts, and then at last to a winding, almost deserted way, that led through the dense shadows of the sheds and storehouses that lined its sides.

It was not till now that I felt the first inkling of suspicion. The gloomy surroundings seemed hardly in keeping with the quarters where one might expect to find The Midnight Lady. I was about to say so when a slight noise sounded from behind. At the same instant the cold barrel of a revolver was thrust against the back of my head.

"Steady!" was hissed at me from the darkness. "One shout and it's your last!"

Those seven words were enough to confirm my suspicions. I had been led into a carefully baited trap.

Even as I realized it, the soft voice spoke again: "I am not a man to waste words, O'Hara, so listen carefully to every one of them. Of course this chat may be a bit one-sided, as any refusal on your part means you won't live to hear its ending."

While he spoke he had been following a winding, narrow lane, from which would come the occasional glimmer of some street lamp, its dim rays feebly penetrating the surrounding gloom. No shout or footsteps reached us from the blackness, and the rumbling traffic was distant and dim. The stolid driver was staring into the night as though unaware of the little tragedy beside him.

"It appears as though you have some sort of a scroll that a friend of mine has convinced me should be his. Now I won't mention any names, but I think you know what happened. It was agreed that the scroll would be given to him, and then you promised it to another. So the gentleman has done the wise thing. He came to me and placed the entire matter in my hands. I have promised him results."

The voice hardened. "That scroll will be given to me in the morning, fella, or else——"

There was brief pause.

"So I guess that makes your position clear. You will stay with us for the remainder of the night, and tomorrow you will be taken to your hotel by two of my boys, who will assume charge of the parchment and relieve you of the worry its ownership is certain to cause. Needless to say, both of them will be well armed, and the flicker of an eyelash means your death."

There came the faintest whine of well-oiled brakes, and the car was brought to a standstill.

"Ah, journey's end," spoke the voice from the rear. "And surely my poor knees will welcome the change." Then as an afterthought: "But perhaps it would be just as well if you were to remain in ignorance of your whereabouts."

There was something ominous about those last words, and at the same instant the gun had been withdrawn from my head. Then came the sound of a moving form behind me. In a flash I had wheeled that I might strike one blow, even if it were to be my last, but too late. The man behind had risen and was swinging his weapon above him, and though I made a frantic effort to dodge it, the heavy gun crashed against my head, and I toppled limply forward.

It was, as I afterward learned, but a few minutes later when I regained consciousness. The first sensation was

that of a pain in my head which obliterated all else, but presently I was aware of standing figures around me, and the sound of several voices in my ears.

"But it's true, Spider—he hit too hard. I tell you the boss has killed him," someone was saying.

"Be yourself!" snapped another. "His head could stand a dozen cracks like that one."

"Don't be too sure. Look how quiet he is."

"He'll snap out of it."

I felt a hand go to my chest. "Spider's right," said a third. "His heart beats like a sledge. Just let him lay here a bit and he'll be all right."

For a moment there was silence, and I felt their eyes upon me.

"I'll go down and tell the others," came from the first. "Besides, I want to find out just what we're gettin' for this little job. Joe, you better stay here and watch with Spider—he's too fond of gunplay."

There came a sound of the speaker's retreating footsteps.

I had heard enough to realize that while I had evidently been carried into some house or apartment, I was still a prisoner. Caution, then, was all-important. I lay quietly a few minutes before I ventured a peep between my lashes, to find myself on a small cot in the center of a dimly-lit and grimy-looking room, evidently some squalid old tenement. The air was heavy with the smell of decay.

But before me was the sight that commanded my attention. Tilted backward on a chair was the powerful man who had been my driver. His undercoat had been discarded, and the shoulder holster strapped to his shirt revealed the black outlines of an automatic. His strong hands toyed with the scattered cards on a table before him. Standing in the doorway, another husky-looking fellow was thumbing the pages of a magazine.

Despite the odds, escape was not impossible. Neither of the men was turned toward me, and were I to rush them I would have the decided advantage of a surprise attack. I sensed that the driver was Spider, and remembered the words that told his love of gunplay.

To disarm him, then, was first in order, though I was somewhat dubious as to just how this could best be done. The man in the doorway seemed without weapons, but of that I was not certain. I ventured to look around for something that might aid me, but in doing so gave an almost imperceptible movement of my body. Slight as it was, it did not escape my guards.

"Come on, get up—get up!" growled Spider.

Never in all the world was a command obeyed as promptly as that one. In a flash I had sprung to my feet and was rushing at the startled gunman. The latter gave a gasp of surprise as he sought to gain his feet, while his hand flew to his holster. But my own right fist had shot forward, and behind it was two hundred pounds of bone and muscle.

The gun-toting Spider shot headlong to the floor!

In an instant I had bounded at the other before he could escape, but to do him justice, there was no fear on that score. As the man saw his comrade go down, he sprang forward, hitting with both hands, and an instant later we were in a furious exchange of hooks and uppercuts, our whirling bodies and aimless course upsetting chairs and tables with wild din.

Even from the first it was apparent that the fight would be one of short duration. A sizzling left hook had

slowed the rush of my opponent, and in the brief instant he halted, a short right sent him reeling to the wall. But the noise of our struggle had reached the men below us and now came shouts and running footsteps as the aroused gangsters hurried to the aid of those above.

Another ten seconds and they would be upon me. I knew well what I could expect once they had poured through the doorway, were not that little barrier quickly bolted to them. Already several had gained the top step and were racing down the corridor. Between me and the passage stood the dazed and bleeding guardsman.

A quick win was my one hope, and I sprang forward to complete the havoc my trained fists had begun. A left feint brought up his guard, and then as the man pawed awkwardly toward me, a smashing roundhouse right crashed into his mid-section. Even as he crumpled, I slammed the door and shot the lock in place, just as the first of those without hurled themselves against it.

Even now it was but seconds till they would be upon me. Not for long could that little barrier withstand the pounding that was being sent against it, for a single bolt was all that held it.

A bullet flew through the door and flattened against the wall. I looked around for some means of escape. In one corner a closet, evidently a clothes-press, was in a dirty, ruinous condition. There was no exit that might lead to any adjoining chambers, nor did the ceiling reveal a trap-door or skylight. My eyes fell on a tiny window. I flung it open and looked out.

Above, for several stories rose the dark outlines of the tenement, as well as another gloomy structure but a score of feet beyond. No light came from the building before me, nor was there anything to show that it was other than deserted. Below was an impenetrable blackness. It might have been twenty stories to the ground beneath. There was no way of knowing, nor did I have the means of exploring its dark depths.

Behind me the smashing grew ever louder. They were howling like wolves, and bullets were pouring into the room. A splinter falling inward told the weakening of the door. Another half-moment and it would crumple.

There was but one slight chance, and I took it. Climbing through the window, I grasped the narrow sill, and lowered my body to its full length in the blackness, my legs groping wildly for some support. On both sides rose dark outlines of brick and stone, above which gleamed a patch of starlit sky. What lay below I could only guess, yet even as I wondered, there came a yell of triumph and the rending of wood.

Then as the door broke open and the leading gunman burst into the room amid a shower of splinters, I released my fingers from their slender hold and dropped to the blackness and unknown depths below.

3. What Happened on the Liner

It must have been madness that caused me to release my hold on the narrow sill and plunge to the black void below. But the instinct of self-preservation was there also, and as the unseen depths rose up to meet me, I tensed my muscles for the sharp impact.

Ten feet! Ten feet only did I fall, and then came that sudden and surprising stop in the tiny alleyway between the two houses. My prison had been but one story high!

But there was no time for rejoicing. Even as I gained my feet I heard

the shouts of those above, as they realized my escape. Directly ahead was a faint glow—scarcely more than a less impenetrable darkness—that I was certain would lead to some street beyond. A bullet whizzed past my head, but I had broken into a wild dash, and a moment later found myself on a narrow, dimly-lit lane.

The dark outlines of some structure on the right showed where it ended, but directly ahead a vacant lot of brush and weeds stretched away to an outline of lights. Across this I tore at breakneck speed. A solitary figure appeared on the street, shouted at me, and ran after me still shouting. But I took no notice of him save to dash on faster. I heard his shouts long after I lost sight of him.

At the far end of the weeds a narrow street showed the lights of several shops and stores. Two iron lines told of a car track, and even as I halted, there came the sound of distant rumbling.

Pausing, I listened for some noise that might warn of pursuit, but no sound came from the blackness behind me, and the street ahead was temporarily deserted.

For several squares I ran swiftly, then turning into a little all-night café, in the lavatory I removed the grime of the adventure. When I emerged a few minutes later it was to discover a taxi traveling slowly along the street, and in less than an hour I was safe in my hotel room once more.

So it was that I escaped the first trap of The Wolf, and for a time at least was unmindful of the pitfalls ahead; though could I have seen into that black future, I doubt whether I would have considered my escape so fortunate.

The following noon the *Drockland* sailed, and America disappeared in the blue; but as I boarded the steamer, I failed to notice the strange pair who watched me from the upper deck, failed to see the hatred on those two faces, nor did I know of the plot that even then was being hatched to keep me from Dakar.

During the following days at sea I must have passed them many times, but as their faces were ever from me, I paid no attention to them. But surely there was enough to occupy me in the lazy days that followed. Watching the mounting white-caps from a deck chair in the sunlight or seeing the play of the moonbeams on the distant rolling water, I could think of nothing but the mystery that was mine.

In the name of sanity, among what manner of weird humans had a fickle fate now thrown me? Here I was bound for the interior of the great Sahara, in search of the mummy of one whose purple-sailed and silver-oared barge had cut the waters of the Nile two thousand years ago, one whose loveliness had charmed the heart of Cæsar in the days of Roman conquest. I was an employee in the service of a dark-eyed beauty who had calmly informed me that she knew that famed enchantress in those dim and distant days!

Manuel De Costa was another mystery. Who was this man who would not halt at murder to gain what he wanted: an age-old Egyptian parchment whose authenticity had been doubted by so many? He had readily admitted it had brought him halfway around the world, but the glib Spaniard did not strike me as being an archeologist, or one who would journey anywhere without a definite reason. No; there must be something else be-

hind it all than the searching for a mummy.

And then I would suddenly become conscious that cruel, unseen eyes were upon me.

On reaching Tangier I found I would have a two-day wait before I could catch a ship bound for Dakar. I spent the time wandering among the narrow alleys of the Arab quarters, hearing the wild din of drums and pipes, and watching the swaying Ouled-Naïls in smoke-hazy native cafés. It was noon the day I boarded the steamer that was to take me to my final destination. Once again there were those who watched me from an upper deck, but now a third had joined the pair. Yet of that three but two were human!

That night at dinner I sat next to a dignified old gentleman whose place was at the captain's right. The officer introduced us.

I FOUND Professor Richards an interesting companion in the days that followed. A former instructor of mathematics, he had given up his teaching some years before to devote his entire study to archeology. Never have I met a more learned man. From the earliest pre-dynasty Kings of lower Egypt to those of their final successors, there was hardly a ruler with whose reign he was not familiar.

We were sitting in our deck chairs late one afternoon, watching the play of the sea in the sun rays. His knowledge of antiques had brought to mind the strange ring of The Midnight Lady. Of course I made no mention as to how it came to be in my possession or the purpose of my voyage, and had but asked his opinion as to its age and origin.

"Almost impossible to state an accurate date," he had mused. "Obviously the ring of some ancient Queen; the size and weight, together with the cobra ensign and other characteristic markings, tell me as much. But as to her identity, h-mm." He held the mystic band aloft, and brought a tiny pocket magnet into play.

"There were three great feminine rulers of Egypt, Mr. O'Hara. Nitocris, a lady of unquestionable wisdom, reigned some five thousand years ago. Fifteen centuries later, in the golden days of Egypt's supremacy, we find the immortal Hatshepsut was sole ruler of her throne. Ages passed to bring at last the third." He turned toward me.

"Queen, Lady of the Two Lands, Qlauapatrat, Divine Daughter, her Father loving."

"Which is all a big mystery to me," I answered with a smile.

"The title given to Cleopatra in hieroglyphic inscription," informed my companion, but there was a tone of anxiety in his voice.

"Cleopatra! Oh come now, Professor, you are not going to tell me that the ring belonged to one of that famed trio."

"Not to the first," spoke the archeologist gravely. "No; not to the first. I have seen the band of Queen Nitocris. Its whereabouts is also known to me. The ring of Hatshepsut is said to have been buried with that long-lived ruler, though of that we cannot be certain, as her mummy was never found. Some wild rumors have it that a few years ago a small party of Arabs came upon it in the ruins of a temple far down the Nile, but after all they are only rumors. As for Cleopatra, it is an historical fact that——"

He stopped short. "But how does the ring come to be in your possession at all?" he asked.

"I am afraid it's too long a story

with dinner so near," I laughed to conceal my own excitement. "Some day I may tell it to you, and I promise you will find it unusual. However, you have shown me one thing: that a ring of such importance should not remain hidden in the pockets of one's clothing, but displayed where all can see it."

And I slipped the heavy band on my end finger.

Inwardly I had not felt the calmness I displayed. There was, I knew, at least one person who could have told the history of the ring, as well as several other matters that had been puzzling me for days. I made a mental note to question The Midnight Lady at the first opportune moment.

We had left our deck chairs en route to the smoking-room when my companion, whose stateroom was next to mine, asked a strange and sudden question:

"Tell me, Mr. O'Hara." He spoke with the awkward manner of one who begins an embarrassing subject. "Have —have you been hearing any strange noises during the past two nights?" His gray eyes looked quizzically into mine.

"Strange noises?"

"Then you have heard nothing to disturb you?"

At my somewhat surprised and negative answer, he shrugged his shoulders with a puzzled smile.

"It must be nerves," he admitted. "Yet I could have sworn that during the dead of night I heard soft whining and the scratching of claws before our doors—like that of some wild animal seeking entrance."

It was late that night before I entered my cabin. In the morning we would dock and there was much that was before me, but the beauty of a tropical moon had kept me on deck till nearly midnight.

Even then I did not seek my berth, but sitting in a corner in the darkness of the room, I meditatively fingered the ring that was to be my one credential in a strange unknown land. For a while my thoughts were many, but presently all grew hazy. Heavy eyelids gradually closed, the cigarette went cold and unlighted, at last to fall to the carpet as my head sank forward on my chest.

The hours passed and the moon rose till its white beams poured through the port-hole, but still I slept. It was close on to four in the morning when with a quick intake of breath I came to myself. I looked sleepily around, but in the dim light of the room its contents were barely discernible. For a moment I was puzzled as to the reason of my sudden awakening, and then in an instant I was conscious of its cause.

It was a sound—the sound of a soft whining as my cabin door was being slowly opened!

Amid the rumbling of the ship's engines and splashing of the waves I could hear it—a soft, impatient whine, together with a heavy breathing. Silently, my eyes glued to the doorway, I gathered myself together as a tall figure in a white shirt appeared in the opening, and the cool night air came whistling into the room. As I tensed myself to attack, with the stealth of a cat the intruder glided into the cabin and closed the door behind him. But at the same instant I sprang from my chair and hurtled toward him.

Even as I launched myself, a foul, almost suffocating odor rose up to meet me, like that of some wild animal's cage gone uncleaned for weeks.

I crashed against the unknown, and together we fell to the floor. Two arms of almost superhuman strength sought to encircle me as a hairy body was

crushed to mine, but it did not take this to inform me that the tall white-shirted thing with which I battled was not a man but a beast!

In the gloom I was unable to make out the features—only the shaggy outlines of a head, and weird green eyes that glared unblinkingly into mine.

But now our bodies were whirling at such a speed as to make any close scrutiny impossible. With the tenacity of a bulldog those great arms sought to press the life from me. But not a whit less savage was my own response as two trained fists sent a series of short, choppy jolts to the body, wicked blows that caused the thing to gasp with pain, and its grip to weaken.

A wild surge spun the great form from me. Together we rose to continue our struggle, but I knew my foe was weakening. A left hook had my two hundred pounds behind it, and although strong teeth and a fetid breath flew to my throat, a smashing right sent the beast-thing flying to the wall. Another minute was all I needed. Whatever fate it was that ordained otherwise I shall never know, but as we fought and strained in the darkness, the sharp trill of a whistle reached us from without.

At the same instant I lunged forward, to stumble over an overturned table and fall heavily to the floor. Only a moment I lay there, dazed, but in that brief interval the creature had sprung through the doorway and disappeared. With a curse at my clumsiness I followed, just in time to see a flying form round the prow end of the ship.

Up the moonlit deck I tore at a speed I have never equaled before or since, to find at its far end the trembling little steward, who stared at me with the wild glare of a maniac.

"The man!" I shouted. "The man who just went by—which way did he go?"

"Oh Gawd, sir!" screamed the steward. "Did you see it? Oh, did you see it? A giant black dog the size of a small horse! It had on pants and a white shirt!"

"You're mad!"

"It was running on its hind legs with eyes like balls of fire! I tried to scream but—but—oh Gawd!"

The weak little fool gave a sobbing cry, and fell forward into my arms in a faint.

At the same instant a ship's officer emerged from a near-by stairway.

"Look after him!" I yelled to that startled official, and pushing the unconscious steward into his arms took up the chase once more.

Already innumerable lights were being flashed around us, as the sleepy murmurs and startled voices of the awakening passengers came from the gloom. The wild shouting and the struggle had aroused them as surely as a gunshot. Soon they would be pouring from their cabins with a thousand questions. But directly ahead the still deserted deck was in semi-darkness, with objects barely discernible.

Behind me I could hear the shouts of the ship's officer who must have jumped to the conclusion that I was an escaping murderer who had callously tossed my victim into his own arms. But there was no time for explanations. Up toward the stern I ran, passing the numerous cabins and stairways but seeing no one, at last to halt, panting, in the shadows of an overhanging lifeboat, leaning against the ship's rail and knowing the pangs of failure.

That last act was to prove my undoing. What I did not know was that

even as I stood there, from the door of a near-by stateroom two figures crept softly toward me—one shaggy and terrible. The splashing waves and rumbling engines, together with the dim yells, drowned their almost noiseless approach, but nothing short of death itself could have kept them from their purpose.

They were but a step behind me when one trod softly to the left. His right arm motioned to my legs, while the awful thing he commanded sprang forward to obey. Even as that vise-like grip snapped around my ankles there came again the terrible odor, like that of some wild animal's cage gone uncleaned for weeks—but too late as a warning. Though I wheeled in a flash, those great muscles had surged forward, and even as I grasped for some support, I was pitched over the small rail into the Atlantic.

Behind me the wail of a wild beast rose in a triumphant howl to the stars!

4. The House of a Thousand Lights

FAR OUT on the broad Atlantic a figure shot through the starlight, a hurtling silent body that apparently could be added as another of the long list of victims who had dared oppose Manuel De Costa.

It seemed an eternity before I struck a rising wave and felt the waters close over my head, and then another lifetime till I emerged to the surface, gasping for the life-giving air. The swift plunge into the sea had cleared any haziness caused by the fall, so that now, other than a slight bleeding around my ankles where the sharp claws of the shaggy one had torn the flesh, it might have been as though the accident had never happened—physically.

It was a small compensation for my present predicament, however, and I knew well whom to thank for it. Perhaps at this very moment Manuel De Costa was searching my stateroom, or had already come upon the scroll secreted in my luggage. My thoughts flashed to The Midnight Lady. Come what may, the Spaniard had beaten us, as we would have no means of guidance to the tomb even if I were able to reach shore.

For a long while I lay in the sea, just supporting myself with a gentle movement of my hands, and watching the receding lights of the steamer as they retreated ever farther into the blackness of the south, to disappear finally in a golden twinkle. A cool night wind whistled above the waves.

There was, I realized, a possible one chance in twenty thousand of my being picked up, and less that I would reach shore.

That lone hope lay in the east, toward which I was now swimming. In all probability the ship had been miles from the coast, but there was the remote chance that it had kept near the shoreline. On that slight hope my fate rested.

For a long half-hour I swam steadily ahead. It was now that I was thankful for the years of athletic training that made it possible for my hardened muscles to cope with the waves. With any kind of luck I should be able to keep afloat for hours.

The first streaks of gray were whitening the skies when a black mass, rising and falling in the waves to the right, attracted my attention. A few strokes brought me to it—a raft-like mass of wreckage beside which floated an overturned life-boat. How it had got there, or where it had come from, I did not stop to reason, but an instant

later I had clambered aboard the wreckage and was examining my find.

It required some time before I succeeded in dragging her on to the wreckage. To my surprise the boat proved quite sound, and a moment later floated upright in the water. By this time the sun had risen to show another welcome discovery. In the east a light blue sky rose from a dark blue sea, and far away at the point where they met lay the faint marks of a long black line—the African coast!

It was the sight of this that renewed my confidence. The boat had no oars, to be sure, but among the wreckage were several pieces that might answer as paddles. I selected two of the stoutest of these, and presently was making headway toward the distant shore.

All that long day I plowed my craft through the waves. It was just dusk when the prow of the boat touched the beach, and I sprang to the shore of a wild and desolate land. As far as the eye could see there was nought but a waste of sand that stretched away to the sky. No light shone in the gathering darkness, nor was there anything to denote any near-by habitation. A mile or so down the beach a cluster of palm trees towered above the water's edge.

I was hopelessly lost. Of course I knew the location to be somewhere north of Dakar, but as to my exact whereabouts—within the radius of a hundred miles—I could only guess. Were I to take up a journey southward I knew that in time I would reach my port, but what of the miles that lay between? Weeks it might take, during which Manuel de Costa could easily find and claim the treasures of the tomb.

For two days I continued along the beach that led to the south, living off the occasional fruits and coconuts, and twice finding water at a tiny brook.

It was sundown on the third day when, hungry and tired, I came to a little cabin on the beach. Here I found a savage old Negress I could neither understand nor pacify. My ragged, unshaven appearance must have added to her suspicion. An ancient musket had been pointed at my head even as I approached the doorway, while the shouting and gesticulating, together with a wild flow of words, told that the curses of a hundred pagan gods were being called down upon me. In a corner a small black boy of ten or so looked at me wonderingly.

The bare walls within the hut fairly shouted filth and poverty, but before the small fireplace a simmering pot wafted its grand aroma. Yet it might have been on the moon for all the good it did me. Even my few pieces of silver were unable to impress the old crone or obtain the food I sought. Her voice rose higher. So loud was our united jabber, we both failed to notice the rapid advance of a score of white-robed horsemen, riding silently over the sands toward us.

The first warning that danger was within a hundred miles of me was the terror that sprang to the face of the old woman, whose gaze suddenly raised beyond where I stood in the doorway. At the same instant a wave of swarthy Arabs swept over me, and I was thrown backward to the sand.

No words were spoken, nor was there any sound other than the heavy breathing of the Arabs and the noise of the struggle. Their very number held me helpless. In a moment I was bound, my hands behind my back and my feet trussed up to meet them, and in another they had carried and tied me to the

spare horse that had evidently been brought for the purpose. Then the entire company swung into their saddles, and galloped off into the dreary wastes that showed on the horizon.

So quietly and thoroughly had the entire matter been carried out, one might have thought them accustomed to finding and capturing a white man every day in the week.

Who these men were or what they intended doing with me I could not guess, nor did there seem to be any possible way of finding out. A filthy gag had been thrust into my mouth, and now the few shouted words I could catch were in an unknown tongue. Faint from hunger, my body aching from the blows and kicks I had received from the Arabs, I was hardly conscious of my surroundings. The sun had sunk, but still we pursued that weary journey.

For what seemed endless hours we rode across the great desert, a rough, uneven country of ravines, lumpy stretches and barren little hillocks.

Darkness had long fallen when we came to a douar of about fifty tents. A crowd of both sexes swarmed out to meet us, holding flaming torches and shouting. At the sight of a captive they redoubled their yells and assumed a threatening attitude. Several of the women had struck at me with sticks, and one young girl was edging through my guards with every intention of dashing her lighted torch in my face, when an old sheik strode from his tent and came forward.

One of my captors released my gag, and spoke a few unintelligible words to the Arab chieftain, before the latter flashed two narrow eyes to mine.

"Arbul-Ben-Hamid tells me he found you on the shores of the great sea," said the sheik in excellent French—a tongue I both write and speak. "Who are you, and how does it come you are in my country?"

Then before I could answer his eyes flashed with a wild anger.

"You are the one," he cried. "You are the one for whom they were searching—that dog of a Frenchman who leads the warriors of The Wolf against my people, burning our tents and seizing our flocks!"

An angry murmur arose from the white-robed figures around me.

"I am an American," I answered.

"But you speak French," insisted the sheik.

"Nevertheless I am still an American," I replied. "I am not the man you want, nor do I as much as know him. As to The Wolf, if you mean Manuel De Costa, he is an enemy of mine also. I was on my way to Dakar to find him when your warriors seized and brought me here."

A sneer showed on the thin face of the sheik. "Dakar?" he asked. "Why should you go there?"

"Because it is there I shall find Manuel De Costa. Because it is there I shall find that which he has stolen from me. I have done nothing to you or any of your people. Up until now I have never seen a desert douar. Release me, then, that I may help you capture this man who is our enemy, and punish him."

I felt this was the best thing I could possibly say. If I were able to convince these people of my own hatred for De Costa, it might not only mean freedom, but enlist their support against a common enemy as well. It was a slow, cunning smile that answered me, one that plainly told I had failed.

"Your lies are many, dog of an unbeliever. You well know that none of

us has seen the French renegade, and are unable to dispute your word." He laughed dryly. "Ah, but the ways of Allah are strange. What you do not know is that my brother, Achmet Bey, who has spied on the followers of The Wolf and seen you many times, returns to his people ere the dawn. No pretense can save you then. He it is that will prove you false. It is his word that will send you to the tortures!"

"But if he proves I am innocent?"

The sheik shrugged his shoulders as he turned away. "Then you will be shot for being in my territory."

THAT was all. Pushing their way through the crowd that surrounded us, my captors hustled me to a tent of goatskin at the far end of the douar. Here I was given food and drink, then, securely bound, was left alone.

But their precaution was apparent. Just before the door one of their armed number stationed himself, and I knew that even if I were able to force my bonds, escape in that direction was hopeless.

Nor was there any tangible promise that it would come from any other direction. With the passing of the hours the hum and murmur of the village gradually subsided as its inhabitants sought the sleeping-mats in their tents. Out of the night would come the distant howls of the jackals and prowling desert things, but within the douar reigned an eery silence, broken only by the occasional call of some Arab sentry.

Of course I knew that the morrow would bring the spy, Achmet Bey, who would prove I was no aid of Manuel De Costa, but I found small comfort in that. The final words of the sheik had doomed me, regardless of the outcome, though I doubted whether he would forego the quick death he had promised, for the pleasures of a drawn-out, torturous one, so loved by the desert's cruel sons.

My position and the tightness of my bonds prevented any attempt at sleep. It must have been well past midnight when a slight noise sounded at the back end of the tent. A thrill shot through me at the sound. There was a slight pause and then I heard it again, this time closer, like some heavy body moving cautiously on all fours.

But who or what could it be? It was as dark as Erebus within the tent, and once the unknown prowler had gained an entrance he would remain unseen. Straining, I turned my head in the direction of the sound just as the back end of my prison rose from the ground, and a dark form hurried within.

There was another, a terrible pause, while I strained my eyes in the blackness, and then the faintest whisper called my name:

"Silence, Monsieur O'Hara — for the love of Allah, silence!" A rough hand fell on my face.

"Who are you?" I gasped.

"A servant to his mistress, and one who would save you," came the voice from the dark. As he spoke I felt the cold steel of a knife touch my flesh as it cut at the bonds that held me. A minute later they had dropped from my hands and feet, and I was free.

I had no time to voice my thanks or surprise. No sooner had the thongs fallen from me when the stranger spoke one word.

"Come!" he whispered.

On hands and knees we crept from the tent to a starlit desert night. Against the clearness of the sky the tents of the Arabs stood out in sharp relief.

At the far end of the douar rose the glow of a campfire, but there came no shout or call to stop us, and the watch-

ing sentries were distant and still. We continued our crawling till we topped a small hillock. On its far side we rose and set off at a rapid pace toward the south. I asked a continuous flow of questions of the young Arab who guided me.

"But how did your mistress ever come to learn my whereabouts?" I began.

"She does not know, *Monsieur*—she is hundreds of miles from here. The beauteous one left for the great interior nine days ago."

"Then how——"

"It is quite simple. It was I who was to meet you on your arrival in Dakar. You were to have been taken to the House of a Thousand Lights and flown inland to join her."

"The House of a Thousand Lights?"

"The castle of my mistress," he explained, then continued: "For long I watched and waited at the docks, but you did not come. Of course all the passengers, as well as the ship's officers, were talking about the strange disappearance of the big American. For a while it was a mystery to me also, but when I spied Manuel De Costa I guessed a part of it."

"Then he was aboard," I murmured, half to myself.

"I returned to the castle and told the airman, Captain Sabbatier, but he, knowing the terrible anger of my mistress, feared to fly inland and tell of your disappearance. Then tonight came the small black boy who rode to The House of a Thousand Lights and told of the huge white man the warriors of Achmet Bey had captured at the hut of his grandmother. I knew well the douar of the cruel Achmet Bey, as well as the tent where he keeps his captives; so acting on the order of Captain Sabbatier, I mounted a swift horse and came in all haste."

"It was a brave thing to do—to risk all this for a stranger," I answered. "But you should not have come alone."

"It was the only way. A large party would have attracted the attention of Achmet Bey's warriors. Ah——"

As we talked we had been walking swiftly toward a range of mountains that rose in the distance. Now on reaching a small cluster of palm trees, I noticed a saddled horse was tethered to one of them. It was the sight of this that brought the exclamation from my companion. A moment later found us beside the beast, and the bridle reins being handed to me.

"Mount and ride swiftly, *Monsieur*. Three miles straight ahead is the pass that leads through the mountains. You cannot miss it. On the far side you will see the glittering outline of 'The House of a Thousand Lights.' They will be waiting for you there."

Then, as I hesitated:

"Haste, for the love of Allah, *Monsieur*. If they were to wake and find us we would both die horribly."

"But you? I cannot leave you alone and unmounted. If you are taken——"

"Far less chance of that than your own capture, *Monsieur*. I who was born amid these sands and mountains will follow a long, round-about route, reaching the castle at late sundown. Fear not for my safety."

A revolver had been handed to me, and now as I swung into the saddle it was to hear a "May Allah protect you," as the brave fellow slunk off into the dark.

For three miles I rode to the south at a fast gallop, circling the numerous gullies and sand-pits that showed black and treacherous in the starlight

Keeping ever the narrow opening of the pass, which appeared as a lighter blur between the towering blackness of the cliffs before me, I drew steadily nearer to the mountain range ahead.

Of course I had not forgotten the dangers behind. Whatever might lie ahead, there was always the chance that the warriors of Achmet Bey had followed.

Being armed with only a revolver I would be unable to make much of a resistance, nor could I hope to hold my own in flight with those trained desert horsemen. Several times I drew rein to listen for the telltale sound of galloping hoofs.

At length I reached the mountains, to follow along the rock trail that led through them. It wound in and out of a score of huge boulders, but its length could not have been more than a quarter of a mile. At the far end the cliffs ended to show a waste of desert below. Away on the horizon to the right the broad Atlantic rolled in the moonlight, behind which rose the glittering outlines of some massive structure, three or four miles away.

How such a place had come to be on a barren, semi-civilized coast, or why it should be agleam with lights at three in the morning, was but another in a long string of mysteries, and I was for resuming my journey, when on rounding a projecting high boulder past which the trail continued I was brought to a sudden and surprising stop.

There, directly before me in the middle of the trail, was a heavy, white-robed figure, upon a black horse. From my own mount I could see his sudden start. Instinctively I knew this to be Achmet Bey, the returning brother of the sheik.

There was a silence as we stared at each other, then: "Halt!" cried the Arab. "Who are you that travels at such an hour?"

My hand tightened around my revolver. "One who would resume his journey," I answered.

I could see him fingering with the rifle that lay across the saddle before him, and peering ahead as though displeased with my answer. Then suddenly he must have realized the truth.

"You're a white man—and escaping!" His trained hand slid to the trigger of his rifle. "But I stand between you and freedom, unbeliever."

"You bar it at your own risk, Achmet Bey. I am armed!" I shouted.

Only for an instant the Arab was silent. Then with a wild whoop and a command to his charger, Achmet Bey set spurs to his horse and dashed toward me, even as my own mount sprang ahead to meet him.

At the same instant the barrel of his rifle glared a red and angry thunder, while I leaned forward on my horse and sent a murderous reply.

5. Beyond the Last Outpost

As THE white-robed Arab charged toward me on that rocky little trail, I had instinctively leaned forward on the neck of my own mount.

It is to that movement I owe my life. The bullet of my foe would have blown out my brains had I been erect. As it was it whistled through my hair. The next instant he thundered past, a dozen inches to the left of me, but as I wheeled in my saddle I could see the shudder of his massive form. His horse galloped on, yet the man must have kept his saddle for a hundred yards before he sank forward, then plunged headlong to the ground.

I followed, and with ready revolver was on the sand almost as soon as he,

but the one shot had been enough. A dark blotch was slowly widening on the chest of Achmet Bey, who stared at the stars with sightless eyes. Out from the night came the sound of his horse's hoofs, growing fainter with each passing second.

An hour later I galloped into the great courtyard of the House of a Thousand Lights and the small army of black attendants that were there, to be quickly ushered within its halls to the waiting Captain Sabbatier.

FOR TWO DAYS I remained at the House of a Thousand Lights, while final repairs were being made on the great plane that was to carry me far inland to the awaiting Midnight Lady.

The castle itself was a massive structure of some distant era. The few words I could get from the tight-lipped black attendants were enough to show that its great towers had risen to the Sahara skies long before the first Crusade. It had been razed several times in past centuries by pirates and wandering desert tribes, but there still remained parts of the original building, as well as a vast series of underground passages and dungeons.

I found Captain Sabbatier to be a gloomy, taciturn man, who seemingly took my presence as a necessary nuisance. During my stay at The House of a Thousand Lights I doubt if he spoke fifty words to me till the night of our departure, when he mentioned that the journey on the morrow would take us two thousand miles inland.

"The Lost Oasis is our destination, *Monsieur;* an ancient well and a cluster of palm trees, beside which stands a tiny mud fort, long forgotten; far beyond the last outpost, and in the very heart of the Sahara."

"But why so far from the coast?" I asked him. "I knew the trip would take us inland, but your mistress mentioned nothing to me of any such distance."

"You are going to find the entire business surprising in more ways than one, before you have finished, *Monsieur,*" he answered with a sneer he made no effort to conceal; adding almost immediately: "To begin with, it is near her own strange country, amid the sands and mountains she loves so well. This castle she uses only on those rare occasions that mark her appearance from the great interior. Then again, if the expedition organizes far inland, it is much less likely to cause the notice and comment that a caravan starting from the coast is certain to do.

"We ourselves shall leave at some black hour when there is less chance of spying eyes to see us—and indeed there is cause for that same haste and caution. Rumor has it that within a half-hour of his landing Manuel De Costa left in his own great plane for some unknown destination to the wastelands in the east."

I made no mention of the fact that I no longer had the scroll, nor was I certain that my presence would be welcomed by The Midnight Lady, now that I had lost it. It came to me also that Manuel De Costa was not the one to waste either time or opportunity and perhaps at this very minute the wily Spaniard was claiming the contents of the tomb.

I liked the whole affair less when I was routed out of a warm bed the following morning in the black hours before the dawn, and led to the waiting plane behind the great castle that was "The House of a Thousand Lights." Clean-shaven and dressed in riding-breeches and khaki shirt, together with the heavy automatic strapped around my waist, I was a different person from

the ragged and bewhiskered man of two short days ago.

There is little to be said of the trip itself, nor do I know the route we traveled, other than that the ship passed to the north of Timbuktu. All that long hot day Captain Armand Sabbatier piloted the plane that flew over the dreary world of sand-hills, valleys and mountains that is the great Sahara.

Indeed, it was not till now that I realized the vastness of its little-known interior. Many times we passed a long line of plodding camels and walking figures that I later learned were some of the numerous salt-caravans that have traveled the Sahara for fifty centuries, and twice a faint popping and a riding company of white-robed figures far below us, showed we were the objects of the rifle fire of a band of the dreaded Tuaregs.

At sundown we came to the ground in a deep valley from which many rocky gorges diverged. Here a small douar of a half-score of tents rose up from one of the great passes, beside which numerous giant boulders were strewn along the bed of what, in prehistoric times, had been a mighty river.

It was evident that our coming had been expected. While a score of figures flocked around the plane, a dignified old sheik escorted Sabbatier and me to his quarters, which had once been a gorgeous silk tent.

OUR HOURS of rest in the silken tent were few. Long before dawn Sabbatier was up and active, and just as the sun rose out of the distant sand-hills we resumed that now hated journey. Again we clambered into the plane, and amid the roaring and shouts of our erstwhile hosts, rose once more into the blue.

It was noon when a tiny fort beside a cluster of palm trees showed in the sands that surrounded it on all sides like a great ocean; a small gray square with thick walls, flat roof and flanking towers. Toward this our ship was gradually dropping when I suddenly became aware of a thin line of white and blue figures that surrounded the garrison, crouched behind the numerous sand-hills a half-mile or so from the fort itself.

Only an occasional shot would crack out from the besiegers, as though the latter were content with an irregular but deadly fire, on the structure before them. At the sight of the oncoming plane a loud volley rose from the surrounding sand-hills, and several bullets hissed murderously past our heads.

But no matter how numerous were the faults of Captain Sabbatier, cowardice was certainly not among them. In an instant he had shown his mettle and was sending the plane at breakneck speed for the opening fort gate; nor was it many seconds till he had landed before it, and we were springing from the ship and making for that little haven.

But now loud shouts were rising from the fort before us, and swarthy, cheering figures appeared at the embrasures. Then as we drew nearer a tall, shapely figure, clad in riding-breeches and an open-necked white shirt, appeared in the opening. A heavy automatic was strapped around the waist of the beauteous woman who was smiling her welcome. Only once before had I seen that dark-eyed charmer, but recognition was instantaneous—The Midnight Lady.

"Hurry!" came the silvery command as her arm gave an imperious gesture. "Hurry lest the bullet of some sniper cuts short this meeting."

Indeed there was good cause for haste. Already the bullets of the be-

siegers were flying around us, or tossing up the hot sand at our feet. But their presence lent wings to our heels, and presently we were inside the little mud fortress and its gate swung shut behind us.

Here we were surrounded by a score of the dark, smiling men who were its defenders; tall, well-built fellows who, though dressed in the flowing robes of the desert, were decidedly of a non-Arabic origin. Their kindly attitude showed that they looked on us two newcomers as friends and allies.

It was a few minutes later that Sabbatier and I talked to their leader in the bare little room on the fort's roof that was her quarters. Briefly I related all that had befallen me since leaving New York, The Midnight Lady asking several practical questions in her musical voice.

Her utter fearlessness was almost uncanny. At intervals the crack of some sniper's bullet, entrenched on the sandhills a half-mile or so distant, would snap against the walls or towers, and once a shot whined through the window, to flatten itself against the wall not ten inches to the right of her, but neither by look nor by action did she betray the slightest knowledge of her danger.

It was only when I mentioned that the scroll was now in Manuel De Costa's hands that for an instant came a change. A wild despair flashed to those long-lashed eyes.

"You are sure of this, positive that he has secured the parchment that will guide him to the tomb?"

I shrugged. "I am afraid it has worked out that way."

"And you say that within a half-hour after his arrival in Dakar, Manuel De Costa is reported to have flown inland?"

At the affirmation of Captain Sabbatier, she toyed with the pen on the desk before her for a brief interval ere she answered slowly:

"Then I think I know the present whereabout of 'The Wolf'."

The Midnight Lady rose from her chair, and walking to the small window, stood looking over the sandy wastes below her.

"He is out there," she spoke with a deadly calmness. "He is out there behind those sand-hills at this very minute, directing the fire of those cursed Arabs toward us. A ship flew in two days ago and landed out there. It can mean but one thing—'The Wolf!' "

"But the tomb," spoke Sabbatier. "If De Costa has gained control of the chart, why does he not hasten to the tomb?"

"Plenty of time for that later, now that there is none to race him to it," was the answer. "No, you will find it is the plan of 'The Wolf' to silence the tongues of those who might speak against him, then proceed on to the tomb at his leisure."

There was a brief silence, broken only by an occasional shot from the sand-hills. It was then I recalled that something I realized might be of importance.

"But there is a bit more," I ventured. "Even with the chart in his possession I doubt if he can find the tomb. The parchment was a crude one that gave no idea as to any location, other than the story of the narrator that told of his many days travel inland. But as to the chart itself—why, it was only a little drawing of some odd-shaped mountains."

"Just odd enough, perhaps, to be recognized by one who knows the Sahara," she added with eyes still trained on the desert before her. "And you

may trust 'The Wolf' for that. No; it is needless to delude ourselves—without the scroll, or at least the drawing to inform us of the shape and size of the mountains it describes, we can never hope to find the tomb."

"But I recall the drawing—I recall it well," I answered. "Three cone-shaped mountain peaks, with the center tip rising high above the others. It is on the top of the latter one where lies the great boulder that is supposed to hide the entrance of the tomb."

"Three cone-shaped peaks!"

The Midnight Lady gave a slight start as she gasped the words, then wheeled to face me.

"Three peaks?—three cone-shaped peaks?" And, as I nodded: "Why, it is the Three Sisters mountains!

"Sacred Cat of Bubastis!" she cried, her eyes bright with a mad joy. "Why I know them well—a wild, stony trio of high peaks, seventy miles to the south of us; a two days' journey, perhaps. And it is there you say the tomb lies? Ah then, the smile of Osiris is surely ours. Once we have got out of this ambush, forty-eight hours should see us at the sarcophagus of the last Ptolemaic ruler."

"But our present position," reminded Sabbatier. "The fort is surrounded, and we are hopelessly outnumbered. The few glimpses I got of the Arab host from the air was enough to show they number half a thousand, against the score or so who defend the walls. We are trapped and——"

"For the time, yes!" she broke in sharply. "No need to mention what I already know. Two days now since the warriors of 'The Wolf' surrounded us, yet not daring to attack. How they learned of my whereabouts I know not, but it is their uncertainty as to the number of my own men that has so far stayed an attack. They know not whether we be ten or a thousand."

"But need you remain here?" put in Sabbatier. "The plane is still without. In five minutes I can fly you miles from danger and——"

"And leave these poor fellows leaderless?" Her glare was enough to silence the Frenchman.

A tall man had appeared in the doorway.

"He will escort you to your quarters below," she addressed us. "You both must be famished as well as weary. Food and a few hours' rest should work wonders, and I may have need of every rifle at dawn.

"Be of good cheer, though. What our friends out on the sand-hills do not know is that one of my riders got through their lines, and tomorrow should bring a thousand fighting-men from the south to aid us."

THAT NIGHT I stood on the roof of the little mud fort, looking through an embrasure to the numerous campfires that glowed and twinkled from the surrounding sand-hills.

At intervals, along the walls, watchful sentinels peered cautiously into the gloom from one of the surrounding embrasures, their rifles held in readiness. In the small courtyard below were gathered the remainder of the tiny garrison, singly or in small groups. Now and then one of their number would cast a nervous glance to the walls above him, and their low murmurs came only at intervals. An air of impending disaster hung over the entire fortress.

For an hour I stood beside the embrasure of that tiny fort beneath the glorious African stars, puzzled by the strange events that had led me to a life of wild adventure. Only five short

weeks ago I had sat in my office in a small New England town waiting hopefully for some client or caller. And now with ready rifle I stood on the roof of a small mud fort in the heart of the Sahara, waiting—but not hopefully—for dawn and the Arab horde.

But what of the promised aid I heard the beauty speak of? I had tried to talk with the dark men of the fort, but my efforts brought only smiles and shrugs, though I spoke both English and French, and as a last resort, the Latin learned in my boyhood. Nothing could be gained from the silent Sabbatier, and there was but one other who could tell me. Yet I doubted if——

Footsteps sounded, and The Midnight Lady was beside me.

"A dangerous place for dreaming, Brian O'Hara," she smiled, pausing slightly on her inspection tour of the sentries.

"I am getting rather used to danger," I answered with a laugh.

"Now if I had been one of those sneaking Arabs out there," she continued, "it would have been easy to creep upon you and reduce the fort's number, by one at least."

"It does seem to be the general idea out here," I admitted. "Treachery and murder."

"Ah, that's the Sahara," came her answering laugh, as she continued. "When you are not plotting to destroy someone, you are trying to keep someone from destroying you."

A short while later I was escorted to the tiny barracks below the fort, to where its defenders, other than the sentries, had assembled for a few hours of precious sleep. Here I quickly followed the example of the others, and despite the fact there was only the hard sand beneath me (for the fort had long since been abandoned till its recent occupancy) fell into a swift and sound slumber.

How long I slept I know not, but it was to awake with a start, as cries and screamings ran in my ears, over which the shouting voice of Sabbatier reached me:

"Aux armes! Aux armes! Les Arabes! Les Arabes!"

6. Saharah Treachery

As THE shouts and screaming reached us in that tiny underground barracks I sprang to my feet, and seizing a rifle, rushed up the stairway, while on all sides, pushing and shoving, came the garrison's ready defenders.

Even as we gained the roof there came a shriek from the lookout platform above us, and the sentry who had been posted there staggered backward. For an instant he stood swaying at its very edge, his hands clawing at the air before him, his features distorted. Then he toppled back, and striking the railing below him in his fall, bounded outward, to come to the roof with a horrible crash.

A moment later found every remaining man of that tiny garrison—for several had already fallen—at the embrasures that encircled the roof, firing like mad at the ghostly figures charging toward us in the faint light of dawn.

There was no denying their bravery. Urged on, perhaps, by the wild promises of De Costa, or the Emir in command, as well as the thoughts of loot and torture, they were as indifferent to our rifle fire as the Spartans of old to the arrows of Persia.

On came the white-robed horsemen. A hundred yards before the fort they divided, and one horde sweeping to the right, another to the left, proceeded to surround us on all sides, while they

kept up a rapid and deadly fire from their wiry mounts. Several others had gained the shelter of the surrounding palm trees, and these, aided by the ace marksmen from the sand-hills, but added to the havoc.

From all sides of the little fort came the answering fire of its defenders, shots that lessened the number of the attackers and sent them toppling backward from their saddles.

Firing madly, I emptied my rifle, only to reload and empty it again. Time after time I could see I had hit one of the horsemen or a crouching figure behind the palm trees, but even from the first I knew our cause was hopeless. Twenty men cannot hold off half a thousand.

Shooting from an embrasure a short distance to the left of me came the rapid fire of a high-powered rifle. It was The Midnight Lady, calm and fearless—an Arab falling almost as often as her finger touched the trigger.

All around me the tall dark men were emptying their rifles with an accuracy that told of years of practise. Whatever might have been said of the little company, their marksmanship and courage were certainly not lacking as they fought on to the inevitable end.

But it could not last for long against those terrible odds. Even while the sands were dotted with white-robed bodies, and half of the encircling horses ran riderless in the wake of the others, it was apparent that the end was but a matter of minutes. Less and less became the firing figures in the embrasures, more and more frequent the whine of bullets around me.

The man on the right of me suddenly shrieked, spun around and fell, his rifle clattering to my feet.

It seemed like hours, yet it could not have been more than ten minutes from the time the first shot was fired, when a hundred running figures charged across the intervening space between the sand-hills and the fort. The dwindling fire of the garrison was turned upon them, but there was no stopping the white-robed warriors.

Up to the very walls they came, and directly under our fire. Then with hundreds of their comrades shooting at us from all sides, the attacking party threw themselves against the aged, half-rotten gate, with axes, swords, and faggots of burning wood.

This seemed the general signal for the others. Suddenly the encircling horsemen pulled to a stop, then wheeling their mounts, set spurs to the wiry beasts and charged directly up to the fort—there to stand upright in their saddles and pull themselves upon the roof, while the remaining Arabs left the palm trees and poured down the surrounding sand-hills to join in the assault.

Was this the end?

All around me were the dead and dying. There could have been no more than six of the garrison on their feet, and yet by some miracle I was still untouched. Cramming another clip of cartridges into my hot rifle, I stole a glimpse around me. The Midnight Lady was unharmed and firing madly, but only she and two others, together with myself, now manned the walls!

The shouting and pounding grew louder as the gate groaned and gave inward.

"The walls!" cried Sabbatier from where he lay in a pool of his own blood. "*Mon Dieu,* they are coming over the walls! They are coming over the walls! Don't let them take you alive—they torture!"

From every embrasure were rising fierce faces and white-clad bodies, some

reaching the walls from the saddles of their horses, while others scaled the heights on the shoulders of those below.

At the same moment the gate gave way, and a howling horde poured into the courtyard, to throw themselves upon the wounded with sharpened knives and terrible laughter.

One great brute rose over the embrasure before me, only to fall back with a scream as my rifle bullet tore into his face.

"Sell your life dearly!" screamed a silvery voice.

I WOULD not give it up without a struggle—I would at least see how many of these howling fiends I could take with me into the next world. And so, as the white-robed forms surrounded me and the wails of the tortured rose from the courtyard, I set myself for the supreme struggle.

A wild swing of my empty gun crashed against the chin of an Arab bounding toward me, with a force that dropped the man in his tracks. An instant later a second lay groaning beside him.

For a moment the Arabs fell back before my wild attack, and then, with a shout, a burly brute sprang forward, swinging a heavy sword. But I had not won a college heavyweight championship for nothing. Charging full upon him, I dodged the falling weapon, and catching the man with a terrific right to the point of the chin, dropped him in his tracks.

That is all I can clearly remember. A volley of blows from fists and rifle-butts were suddenly rained upon me from behind; and even as I stood there, dazed and swaying, a shot rang out.

I reeled and fell to the courtyard below.

It was the heat of the Sahara sun, beating on my upturned face, that aroused me some hours later. For a while I was conscious of only a terrible pain in my head, but presently realized that a white-robed figure lay across my chest. With a groan and an effort I sat up, pushing the heavy form from me.

All around that silent garrison was death and destruction. Nude bodies and bits of wearing-apparel, silent figures. Torture and mutilation had also played a noticeable part, and their horrid signs were sickening. How I had escaped the latter, I could not imagine, nor was it till days later that I learned the timely appearance of Manuel De Costa, a moment after my fall, had halted the grisly work of his henchmen.

Gingerly I put my hand to my head. The bullet wound proved but a slight gash which had furrowed the flesh across the temple. It had stopped bleeding, but the dried blood smeared my face and clothing—a gory appearance that doubtless convinced the Arabs I had been killed instantly.

Slowly I rose to my feet, hardly knowing where I was or what I should do next. A scrutiny of the forms around me, as well as those on the walls above, failed to reveal either The Midnight Lady or the French flyer, Sabbatier. Whether they had been carried off as the captives of De Costa, or what had been their fate, I could not guess, but I was comforted to know the beauteous one was not among the victims of the fort.

I dragged myself to the well beyond the fort. Here I drank and bathed and then, greatly refreshed, made my way once more to the broken gateway. Near by, the remains of the plane lay, now a smoldering ruin.

To the left a beaten path of hoof-

prints showed the trail of the survivors of that whirlwind attack, and this I determined to follow. It stretched on past the sand-hills and away to the sky, but there seemed no other choice.

In the tiny barracks I foraged around, finding among other things a cork helmet, ammunition and firearms, as well as two water canteens. These I filled at the well, as I realized how precious water would shortly become. A meager meal was then hastily swallowed, and within half an hour of my regaining consciousness I had taken up the trail of the white-robed raiders.

What I could hope to accomplish I did not stop to reason. That I might find and aid The Midnight Lady may have been behind it all; though how one man could bring about that rescue in the face of those hundreds of desert warriors was an entirely different matter. I must have continued on for a good five miles, seeing no one, though once I was brought to a standstill by the distant sound of a gun.

The sun was high, and I was nearing the top of one of the sand-hills, when a strange, moaning sound reached me. For a moment I thought it might be the cry of some animal, and held my rifle ready, but it was not till I topped the hill that I discovered my error.

Below me the sands sloped down to a small hollow. There, with a bulky, ragged blanket propped under his head was an old, gray-whiskered Arab, horribly wounded, and evidently on the point of death. For a moment I hesitated, fearful of some trap, but it came to me that the scene was much too terrible to be other than real. Lowering my gun I ran over and knelt beside him.

He turned a haggard, sunken face toward me. "Water!" he gasped. "For the love of Allah, water!"

It needed but one look at those glazing eyes to realize he was dying. In an instant I had lifted his head, and his lips opened for the welcome water my canteen offered. With a noisy gurgling the old man drank eagerly before he lay back with a sigh.

"Now Allah be praised, I die in peace."

Then his eyes suddenly widened, as though he were seeing me for the first time.

"But you," he gasped. "You are white! Yes, you are white!" The weak voice told incredible surprise. "But how does it come that you are here?" he whispered a second later. "You cannot be a survivor of the Lost Oasis attack?" The last was half a question.

"Were there any others?" I asked. "Some captives, perhaps?"

"There were—two captives."

"Two?"

"Yes. The famed mystery woman whose undying beauty has long been the theme of legends told around the campfire—she and the Frenchman."

I could see his breath was failing, and bent low to catch the words.

The weak voice struggled on. "But you; you have given drink to me, an enemy, one who fought and shouted for your death but a few hours ago!"

"My own fire was turned against you," I reminded.

"It is a debt I owe you," he continued, "one that the nearness of death makes me unable to pay."

"You might," I interrupted. "You might tell me something that would help me find the captives."

"I—I will," he gasped. "Yes, I will. Trust Abdul—he will help you. Yes—trust Abdul!"

As he spoke the words the man glared at me. For a moment as he strained forward, his lips struggled for speech. Then a sigh escaped them, a

terrible shudder shook his form, and the old Arab raider lay quite still.

"Yes, you may safely trust Abdul," spoke a quiet voice.

I sprang to my feet and wheeled at the sound. To my surprise a tall young Arab was standing not two paces behind me. So intent had I been on the words of the dying man that he had crept up without my seeing him. Instantly my hand flew to my holster, but the newcomer only smiled at the gesture, then gazed on the form before us.

"It was written, then, that I should come too late," he spoke, bending over the dead man. "I was on guard at the pass when the raiders returned and told how my uncle had been wounded and left on the sands—the usual treatment of 'The Wolf' to the aged, or those who have served their purpose. I came in all haste, but——"

The young Arab turned and faced me. "I heard the words that were spoken," he went on. "That you are a survivor of the battle, I know, but why you should be following the trail of the warriors, Allah alone knows."

There was a brief silence as we stared at each other.

"Had I not been sent to the north, the day before the departure of the warriors," he added, "I too would have been among the attackers of the fort. Of all his many followers, I am 'The Wolf's' most trusted messenger."

"But your uncle," I reminded. "He said I could trust you."

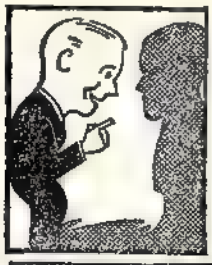
"And so you may. I am 'The Wolf's' most trusted messenger, but I am also his most deadly enemy." His black eyes flashed a sudden anger. "Look at that!" he cried, raising his left hand, and I could see that three of his fingers had been severed. "That is the work of 'The Wolf!' That is what happened when I misjudged the location of a caravan he would have destroyed, but a scant three miles."

"I do not know who you are, white man, but I will help you. The last words of my beloved uncle shall not be false ones. In the meantime——

"Up with your hands, dog of an unbeliever!" he roared suddenly. "Up with them or I blow your head off!"

At the same moment wild yells sounded from the near-by sand-hills, and a score of white-robed horsemen came galloping toward us!

Don't miss next month's thrilling chapters of this unusual tale, in which The Midnight Lady's identity is revealed. We suggest that you reserve your copy at your magazine dealer's now.



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STAR SINGLE-EDGE BLADES 4 FOR 10¢

FOR GEM AND EVER-READY RAZORS

"It moved in violent jerks, as though whatever was imprisoned inside was hurling itself against the stone-like seal."

Fothergill's Jug

By THORP McCLUSKY

A fascinating story about a strange jug that was dug out of the sands of Mesopotamia, and the weird entity that dwelt within the jug

YESTERDAY, in Winsted, Connecticut, a total stranger told me this story. My wife and I live in Hartford; we have friends in Winsted, the Fred T. Winns (the resemblance between the city and family names is pure coincidence), and it was at their home that the narrative which follows was related to me.

It seems significant to me that no one in Winsted knew that we were coming there yesterday. We ourselves didn't know. Yesterday was a Saturday, a beautiful day, and about ten o'clock in the morning, Ruth, my wife, suggested that we go driving. We drove up along the Farmington River to Collinsville, and there Ruth said, "Well, we've come this far; we might as well continue on and see the Winns." It happened like that, without premeditation.

The Winns live right on the main

road through Winsted, but considerably beyond the center, almost out in the country. Theirs is a large, old house set on a corner lot; there is plenty of land around that house, a big garden and a yard with lawn chairs and swings scattered about, and horseshoe pits staked out in a level spot.

It was about two o'clock in the afternoon when we drove into the Winns' yard. We had purposely taken our time, stopping here and there on our way to smell the flowers—like Ferdinand—and lingering over a leisurely lunch at a small roadside grill. Fred, when we arrived, was pitching horseshoes in the yard with a slender, white-haired gentleman I had never met before; Laura was in the house making deep-fat doughnuts. Laura, smiling broadly, came out on the side porch, and Ruth jumped out of the car and they hugged each other and went into the house together. I climbed more slowly from behind the wheel and went over to the quoits game.

"Go ahead, finish your game," I said; I knew that quoits was a small mania with Fred. "I'll watch." I sat down on a shaded bench, stretched out my legs and relaxed.

Fred and the stranger smiled and nodded, and finished out their game. Then they pulled handkerchiefs from their pockets and, wiping their faces and hands, came over to me.

"So, Mac," Fred grinned, "good to see you again. Pleasant surprise. Can you stay over? Meet Doctor Bowen—Jim Bowen; Thorp McClusky. Shake hands; make yourselves acquainted."

The doctor glanced at me with an odd, wary curiosity as we shook hands. That fleeting expression on his face puzzled me; it was so peculiarly questioning. Then it passed, and we were tossing genial remarks back and forth. Fred volunteered the information that the doctor owned a camp on Highland Lake—that he spent his summer vacations there.

"Awful lot of cottages at Highland Lake," I blurted. "Not much solitude left up there nowadays."

"Yes, there's little solitude left around Highland Lake," Doctor Bowen admitted, with a dry laugh. "I used to prefer occasional solitude, but no more. Fact is, at one time I owned an old farm up in the hills back of New Hartford, and I used to go up there summers, all alone. I'm a bachelor, you know. But I sold it in 1928, and built the place on the lake. I'm growing more gregarious with the years, I guess."

Right then I knew, with intuitive certainty, that there was a story behind the sale of that farm. But it was just as apparent that Doctor Bowen had no intention of telling us more.

"Why, New Hartford's had quite a cosmopolitan summer colony for years," I persisted, with more doggedness than tact. "Efrem and Alma Gluck Zimbalist are there quite frequently. Didn't you meet them?"

"No, I didn't," he said almost bruskly. "I had only one friend in New Hartford—and he's dead." The muscles of his face smiled quickly, then, but there was no lightening in his eyes. "Shall we have a game of quoits, Mac? —I may call you Mac? Do you play?"

"Mac's a writer," Fred hurriedly explained.

Surprisingly, Doctor Bowen nodded.

"I know he is. I recognized his name when we were introduced." He said directly to me, "I've read some of your more imaginative stories."

It struck me as definitely odd that he hadn't mentioned this before. Every-

one likes to have his name or his work recognized; mere recognition is subtle flattery. . . .

"WEIRD TALES?" I asked.

Again he nodded. "I've been a WEIRD TALES addict since 1928."

He had sold his New Hartford farm in 1928.

"What do you think of H. P. Lovecraft's tales?" I asked him, though that date, 1928, was beginning to whirl around in the back of my brain. Fred said something polite and went and got two lawn chairs, and the three of us sat down in a compact little triangle, Fred and Doctor Bowen in the lawn chairs and I on the bench, and for about half an hour Doctor Bowen and I talked about Lovecraft. But all the time we were talking I felt the peculiar conviction that Doctor Bowen was deliberately withholding information that he knew would interest me, information, moreover, that he desperately wanted to give me.

Finally I asked him, point-blank, "What's on your mind, Doc? Here we are talking about Lovecraft, but you're really not thinking about Lovecraft at all; you're thinking about something entirely different."

He parried that with a nervous little laugh, and a question of his own.

"Tell me, McClusky, do you fellows really believe the stories you write? I'll elaborate on that—of course, I know that fiction is fiction, and that names and dates and places are changed—but do you really have any belief in the plausibility of the basic material you use?"

I LIT a cigarette, thinking my answer out carefully before I replied.

"Here's my own personal conviction," I told him, then. "I don't believe any writer in the world ever turned out a story without the notion—no matter how faint or obscured—somewhere in his mind that the incidents he relates might somewhere, sometime, somehow, come to pass. That statement is especially difficult to apply to the so-called fantastic type of story. Nevertheless it is true that, in almost every instance, these so implausible-seeming stories have a definite foundation, a definite genesis, either in legend—and remember that wherever there is smoke there is fire—or in the workings of observable phenomena which have not yet been satisfactorily explained, or in imaginative prophecy. Have you read *Lo,* by Charles Fort?"

"No, I haven't."

"Well, in *Lo,* Fort collected a tremendous mass of evidence detailing phenomena all of which is beyond mundane explanation. Those events occurred; there's not a doubt of that; they're all well authenticated. And—this may come as a distinct surprise to you—there's plenty of pretty grim historical evidence behind those New England stories Lovecraft wrote. In some instances you can even definitely tell what family legends he was shooting at; he was so certain that what he wrote would be taken for out-and-out fiction that, although he always meticulously altered all names, he left many of the dates as they actually were."

"I didn't know that," he muttered, and I could see that he was surprised.

"Well, it's so," I told him, "and we can take it for what it's worth. Lovecraft worked, more often than not, from meager material — old letters, courthouse records, genealogies, obituary notices. Aware that the mundanely inexplicable had occurred, he tried his hand at explanation. Perhaps some of his explanations are far-fetched; perhaps some of them approach, however

distantly, the truth. Who knows? And who can say that Lovecraft might not —and with good reason—have half-believed those tales he wrote?"

He mulled that over for what seemed a long time. Then, in a curiously small, troubled voice, he said, "Listen, McClusky; if I had any assurance that you wouldn't laugh at me I'd tell you something that'd knock you right off that bench."

"I won't laugh at you," I promised.

He shifted uneasily in his canvas chair. "But I'm telling this as truth," he insisted. "This isn't conjecture; it's real. The little bit that I tell you I saw, I *did* see. It's had me half mad for years, trying to find the explanation. Fothergill, like Lovecraft, had a theory. But I warn you that it's beyond our present-day, mundane science."

"Shoot," I said. "If you tell me your story as truth I have the privilege of believing you or not, as I please. Anyhow, I won't laugh."

He exhaled a tremendous sigh of relief. "All right," he said. "It'll take a load off my mind—just the telling; and so long as you won't laugh——

"I wasn't always as gregarious as I am now. In fact, I was, for years, quite the reverse of gregarious. Not that I was anti-social; I did have a few tried and true friends, and these I have retained through the years. But I had no instinct for fraternalism, for striking up superficial and meaningless acquaintanceships, for the 'Hail fellow, well-met' sort of existence.

"My about-face came in the late summer of 1928. . . .

"I acquired the New Hartford farm in 1925, and my reasons for purchasing it were two. First, although the land itself was poor, the house was one of the most exquisite—and I do not use that adjective lightly—examples of early Colonial design I have ever seen anywhere—and in a perfect state of preservation; practically all it needed was a coat of paint. Second, the place promised the seclusion I felt that I occasionally needed. The nearest house was more than a hundred yards away —and I carefully ascertained its ownership before I purchased my property. It was owned by a queer duck named Fothergill, an archeologist—the sort of fellow who would be away for months on end and who wouldn't be likely to bother me even when he was in residence."

"Fothergill?" Fred Winn asked now. "Fothergill? I place the name now. Wasn't he killed in an explosion—eight, nine years back? Didn't his house blow up, or something? There was quite a lot of talk about that."

"He was killed," Doctor Bowen said quietly, "at about two-thirty in the morning of August eleventh, 1928. But it wasn't an explosion that killed him."

Still speaking in that quiet monotone that carried more conviction than any amount of rhetoric, he went on:

"The New Hartford place suited me ideally. It was not so far from New York that I couldn't drive the distance in a couple of hours, and stepping into that farmhouse was like going back three hundred years. I furnished only three or four of the downstairs rooms, but I furnished them well—with authentic Colonial pieces; when I'd finished I felt as pleased as though I'd built a castle. . . .

"Well, in the summer of 1926 I met Fothergill. His first name was Robert —Robert Fothergill. I met him by accident; after all, our properties adjoined and fronted on the same road, so I suppose our meeting was inevit-

able. And after we'd run into each other a couple of times I found out, to my surprise, that I liked him. We gradually struck up a friendship.

"I DON'T think I saw him more than a dozen times that summer. I hadn't seen him before because he'd been away for ten months with some expedition to some gosh-awful place—Mesopotamia, I think. He told me that they had a hole out there in the desert; it was over forty feet deep in some places, and they'd already unearthed the ruins of nine distinct civilizations, city piled upon city like the layers of a cake. And they weren't to the bottom yet; they were going back and dig some more. Fothergill sailed for England around the end of August, and that was the last I saw of him that year.

"He was in New Hartford for about two months the next summer. We picked up where we'd left off, without any fuss or feathers; we were both bachelors, remember, up there to rest and get away for a time from the pressure of living. We each did our own cooking, and we got into the habit of taking our evening meals together; he'd come over and have supper with me one night, and I'd return the visit the next. It saved labor.

"He showed me a lot of pictures, that summer, of their camp, their excavations and what-not. They'd done a large amount of digging; they'd plowed up a piece of desert you couldn't put into a forty-acre lot, and, as I told you, in some places they'd gone down pretty deep, forty feet or more. He showed me a lot of photographs of brick walls—those old cities over in Asia Minor were mostly built of brick, you know—and pieces of pottery, and inscribed tiles, and statuary; oh, they were digging up a tremendous quantity of stuff, all prehistoric; the city down at the bottom of those forty-foot holes was forgotten before the Pyramids were built.

"Well, he went away again that year at along about the same time, around the end of August. And he showed up in New Hartford again around the middle of the following July—July, 1928. He was later than usual in getting home that year; he'd had to stop in London and catch up on a lot of desk work.

"He telephoned me on the day he arrived (as much as I disliked the idea of having a telephone at the farm I'd had one installed so that I'd always be accessible in emergency; that's part of the hell of being a doctor) and asked me to come over. I had just finished lunch; it was about one o'clock in the afternoon, and I had planned to get in three or four hours' work on a case history I was writing up, so I suggested meeting for dinner. He was insistent, in a voice so thick and strange that I thought he must be ill. Too, he hadn't dropped in, casually; he had telephoned. That was odd. I went to his house at once.

"Obviously he had called me at almost the moment he'd set foot inside the house. He had not changed from the trousers of the blue serge suit he had worn up from New York; the coat and vest and a battleship-gray necktie lay on the hall table. The place was a mess; he'd had the house opened and cleaned and everything turned on, but the hall was still jammed with trunks and boxes of books and crates of God-knows-what. I noticed that he had already opened one of the crates, and removed its contents—

" 'Come into the living-room,' he

said abruptly, as soon as we'd shaken hands. 'I've the Devil's own wine-jug in there, and I want to show it to you.' He grasped my arm and actually tried to pull me along.

"I'd got a whiff of his breath as he greeted me, and it was enough to knock a man down. 'What's the matter with you?' I said, as I followed him into the living-room. 'You smell like a two-legged brewery. You're drunk.'

"He looked me squarely in the eye, and I saw that, though his face was flushed and his eyes were bloodshot, he was actually in complete command of his faculties. The liquor he had drunk—and obviously he had been drinking for days—had merely bolstered him up. Of course, I had no way of knowing, then, why his nerves were so utterly shattered.

" 'Drunk?' he repeated. 'Doc, I was never soberer in my life. And I've lapped up a quart of whisky a day ever since we left Bagdad. Sit down.'

"I sat down on a newly polished chair. Fothergill stood before the fireplace looking at me. He seemed too nervous to relax.

" 'But why?' I asked, perplexed. 'You never were a boozer——'

"He kicked out his right foot savagely. 'That'—and he swore a stream of indigo, sulphurous profanity—'that ——— ——— ——— thing!'

"My eyes followed his unorthodox gesture. He'd always had a lot of outlandish bric-à-brac cluttering up his living-room; I suppose that is why I'd missed noticing the object directly I came into the room. I looked at it now.

"It was a crude, vase-shaped vessel, of exceedingly primitive workmanship and made, I assumed from its appearance, of unglazed fire-baked clay. It stood about eighteen inches high, and its greatest circumference was at the throat; it was, in fact, just a jug—a plain, ordinary, though certainly very ancient receptacle for liquids. You've probably seen pictures—most likely in illustrated Bibles—of desert women carrying similar jugs on their heads or on their shoulders. I stared at the thing—and I can't say that I was particularly impressed.

" 'Look at the way it's stopped up,' Fothergill said suddenly.

"I got up from my chair and went over to the jug; I saw then that its neck had been sealed with a wax-like plug. I reached down and scratched the stuff with my fingernails; it was as hard as stone and of a yellowish-gray color; it reminded me of petrified beeswax.

"Fothergill understood perfectly what I was thinking. 'Sure,' he nodded, 'there's something inside. That's why I sneaked the damned thing into my tent; I wanted to open it up myself. There were only two native diggers with me at the time; it was easy. I had no intention of stealing the jug then; that notion came later.'

"He paused, then said thickly, 'I stole the ——— ——— jug because there's something alive in it!'

"I looked at him, then at the vessel. 'You're cuckoo,' I said.

"He stared at me with owl-eyed seriousness. 'Listen,' he said, 'I've transported that ——— ——— jug six thousand miles, and I tell you there's something alive in it. I'll tell you how I tried to open the thing.

" 'First I dug at that plug with my pocket-knife, but I couldn't even scratch it; it's as hard as stone. Later on I got a brace and bit from the

commissary, and I made a little impression with that, but I had no vise in my tent and I was afraid I'd shatter the thing, so I gave that up. I'm damned glad now that I did.

" 'Bowen, that plug is some sort of wax, some sort of plastic; you can see how it was put in there: it was poured in there hot. So I decided to try to melt it out. I made a little oven out of bricks, and took the top off my gasoline lamp, and set the lamp inside. Then I lit her up, and put the jug on top, bottom-side up. That brought results, but not the results I'd anticipated.

" 'Listen; the plug didn't melt any; my flame wasn't hot enough. But whatever's inside didn't like that heat treatment a little bit. About two minutes after I'd set that jug on the fire it began to jump around like a teakettle on a stove; I couldn't hold it still. And I tell you I didn't try very hard to hold it still, either, when I saw that; I took it off the fire quick and put my lamp back together again, and in about five minutes it stopped jiggling. And that's the gospel truth, so help me.'

"I thought that over for a minute. 'You haven't necessarily proved that whatever's in there is alive,' I pointed out. 'There have been chemists, of a sort, since time immemorial, haven't there? Maybe you've dug up some ancient alchemist's pet brew. It's a wonder you weren't blown to blazes.'

"He shook his head. 'The thing's alive,' he reiterated stubbornly. 'I'll show you.'

"He walked out into the hall, and I could hear him prying the boards off one of the crates. After a moment he came back with a half-dozen half-inch boards and a bundle of excelsior; he arranged those combustiles in the fireplace, put the ancient vessel on top, lit a match and touched off the excelsior. A bright, hot flame that quickly singed our faces and drove us back from the fireplace sprang up at once.

" 'Watch the jug,' Fothergill grunted.

"I watched, all right. The vessel lay on its side in a bed of fire; as the excelsior burned away from beneath, it sank down between two blazing boards; it was certainly getting hot.

"THEN THAT jug began to move! It moved in violent jerks—as though whatever was imprisoned inside was hurling itself again and again against the stone-like seal. And it moved purposefully—in one direction! Jerk—jerk—jerk—inch by inch it shifted along the trough between the blazing boards, until it slid with a thump down to the hot tiles. Then it began to roll on its circumference—quite swiftly, too—out toward the center of the room. When it was about ten feet from the fire it stopped abruptly and decisively, as though the whole of its enigmatic contents had suddenly thrown their mass into one quick braking movement.

" 'My God, Bowen; you never saw water boiling in a pot, or a mess of chemicals, either, act like that!' Fothergill groaned. 'You want a drink? I've got practically a full quart in my bag.'

"I did want a drink, desperately, but I didn't want Fothergill to see how severely his demonstration had shaken me—and I wanted one of us, at least, to retain some semblance of sanity. The hardwood floor was beginning to scorch, so I quickly called Fothergill's attention to that.

" 'The thing's burning your floor.'

"He looked at the jug, then at me, then back at the jug. 'I'll fix that,' he said, and got the fire-shovel from the wood-bin and kicked the jug onto it. The floor was charred where the jug had lain.

"FOTHERGILL walked over to the nearest chair, and, slumping into it heavily, sat staring at the charred spot on the floor. 'That's why I've been drinking,' he explained then, simply. 'Living with that ——— jug for two months has done things to me.'

"After a while his gaze lifted to my face. Until that moment I would never have believed that a man's eyes could carry such a concentration of mingled horror and fascination in them.

"He began, almost dreamily, to talk, to hazard conjecture upon conjecture, to speculate upon the nature of the thing in the jug.

" 'Bowen,' he said, and I could see that look of fascinated horror deepening in his eyes, 'you've read *The Arabian Nights,* of course. You remember those tales of the Jinn?' He laughed jerkily. 'The thought has occurred to me that I might have one of those boys cooped up in that jug. Fantastic notion, eh? The Jinn are supposed to have been both malevolent and benign; let's hope that the fellow over there on the fire-shovel—look at him jump!—is of the latter variety. He might get out of his jug some day, and if I were in the vicinity I'd prefer to have him in an amiable mood.' He paused, and a moody grin twisted across his face. 'I guess I've aggravated him some, with those toastings. He doesn't seem to like them.'

" 'My conception of the Jinn has always been that they were flame demons,' I interrupted. 'It doesn't seem plausible that a little fire like yours could bother such an entity to any extent. Of course—just to keep the record clear—I want you to understand that I think you've got bats in your belfry. You'll probably be able, in time, to explain your Mexican jumping-bean jug without any recourse to Jinn, or afreets, or *The Arabian Nights,* either.'

"His moody grin returned. 'It may interest you to know,' he continued dreamily, and I could see that he really didn't care whether I was there or not, that he would have gone on talking to himself, speculating, advancing and weighing various theories in his own mind were I not there at all, 'that your notion of the Jinn is pure Mohammedan superstition. Of course any conception of flame creatures *is* nonsense—as untenable as Empedocles' theory of the elements; earth, air, fire, and water. In ancient Arabian belief the Jinn were quite different. True, they were volatile as smoke, but they were corporeal; you remember that they could be confined—even in a jug. The real Jinn were not supernatural; they were merely creatures of such rarity that their purely natural attributes seemed to the Arabs to partake of the supernatural. All the demonology in the world had its origin in fact, Bowen. It's not impossible—just because such creatures don't exist today—that there was on this earth at some time in the remote past a race of creatures possessing the ability to change their shape and distend their beings at will; creatures which the early Arabs knew as the Jinn. Good God! we have plants today that live wholly upon the moisture in the air, and grow with tremendous rapidity, too. Who can

say with absolute certainty that the Jinn did not once live upon this earth, that they could not have been practically ageless, that there is no living Jinni imprisoned in that jug there at this very moment?'

"He was silent, still staring moodily at that charred spot on the floor, and for a moment I thought that he had finished, but then he added softly, 'Of course, there's the probability that the Jinn were of extra-terrestrial origin. There were never many of them, and the Arabs—God knows how—pretty well put the Indian sign on what few there were. Perhaps, if I let that fellow out of his bottle, he'd light out for home so fast he'd make Barney Oldfield look as though he were driving backward.'

"That afternoon's conversation ended just about there. I got up, told him that he was loony, and suggested, with considerable acerbity, 'If you're so damned curious about what's in that jug of yours, why don't you send it to a laboratory and have it opened?'

" 'Oh, no,' he said. 'I don't want it opened. I'm afraid of what might happen if whatever's in that jug got out. Besides, if *anybody* opens it, I'm going to open it myself. A good hot fire'd soften up that plug. See?—it began to run a little bit this afternoon——'

"I snorted. 'My advice to you is: either have that thing opened by an expert, or take it out in the lot and bury it and forget about it. In any case, don't try to open it yourself. You might blow yourself up. I'm going back now. Come over for dinner tonight, eh? At seven.'

"His voice followed me out the door. The thing wouldn't explode, Bowen. The Jinn don't explode; they just *grow*——'

"I put both hands over my ears and fled up the road.

"HE ARRIVED for dinner at precisely seven o'clock; he'd timed it so perfectly that I was suspicious he'd waited down the road with watch in hand, counting off the seconds. The reason for his meticulous punctuality was immediately clear; he was drunker than any human being I've ever seen still off all fours. He was so drunk that he didn't even think about his precious jug until around ten o'clock—just as he was about to go home.

" 'I put *him* in the woodbox by the fireplace,' he told me abruptly—he was wandering around my living-room looking for his hat, which he hadn't worn at all—'and is he *mad!*'

"I knew right away what he was talking about. 'Mad?' I asked.

" 'Mad.' Fothergill nodded. 'I can tell when he's mad; I can feel the mad boiling all over the room. He's mad because he thought he was going to get a chance to roll his jug around until it fell off some place and broke, maybe. He can't roll it around much, or even tip it over, in the woodbox, though; there's not enough room. Boy, he's sizzling! I guess I woke him up good this afternoon, all right. He's been jiggling his jug ever since. Don't ever tell me again that he's not alive, Bowen. I know!'

"A little later, after I'd managed to persuade him that he really hadn't worn his hat at all, I walked him home.

"During the next three weeks I don't think he drew a sober breath. I saw him every day, sometimes two or three times a day; he kept coming over to my house at unpredictable hours, and we had dinner together every night—how he ever managed to prepare the meals

he did cook is a mystery to me. And yet I never saw him stagger greatly, and his speech, though thick, was always rational.

"Through that time the jug remained in the woodbox in his living-room. Every time I came into his house I looked at it, but it always appeared pretty inanimate to me. I mentioned this several times.

" 'He's gone back to sleep,' Fothergill, on these occasions, told me impatiently. 'The only thing that really seems to wake him up is a good scorching. Then he jigs around for five or six hours before he quiets down. I've been leaving him alone.'

" 'You'd better leave him alone for good,' I suggested. "You'd better bury him out in the lot and forget about him.'

" 'Yes, I guess I'll do just that,' Fothergill assented. But the days passed, and the jug still remained where it was.

THEN one day—it was the tenth of August—he abruptly announced that he'd decided to return immediately to England. 'If I stay around here any longer I'll degenerate into a common drunkard,' he told me, and I agreed with him. 'Now, look,' he proposed, 'I'm sailing at midnight on the twelfth. I've a case of champagne home—no bootleg stuff; you come over around seven tomorrow night and we'll have a real bang-up farewell party.'

"I accepted, with genuine pleasure and considerable relief. I couldn't resist asking him, though, 'What are you going to do with that jug of yours?'

"He laughed. 'I've already dug a six-foot hole out behind the barn, and tomorrow morning I'm going to plant the damned thing and forget about it.'

"After a little while he went home.

"I never saw him alive again. . . .

"I puttered around until after midnight that night, and after I finally did get to bed I slept like a log. It seemed as though I'd only been asleep an instant when the telephone's ringing woke me. I switched on the bed-lamp and looked at the clock. It was almost half-past two. I came wide awake at once; I was certain that it was New York calling.

"But it wasn't New York; it was Fothergill, drunker than a lord, so drunk that his voice kept alternately roaring in my ears and then fading away as he fumbled with the telephone. He was in a mood of crazy exuberance.

" 'Hups!—you old sawbones!' he bellowed—'did I wake y'up? Shorry—Hip!—Hip!—get your clothes on an' come over an' see th' show! I've got ol' typhoon in his jug wired up—urrupp!— Pardon me—in the fireplace, an' I'm toastin' the livin' daylights out of him! I'll show him who's king! Right now the plug's drippin' out of his jug like maple syrup out of a spigot!'

" 'You crazy drunk!' I yelled into the phone—and I was so angry at him that I was practically inarticulate. 'You cut out your monkey business and get into bed before you have an embolism and maybe die right there!"

"The telephone was silent for a moment, and I could picture Fothergill in my mind's eye—sitting swaying back and forth in his big chair before his fireplace (the fire blazing there before his liquor-inflamed eyes) with the telephone held loosely in his fumbling hands. Then he chuckled drunkenly.

" '——drippin' out of his jug like —aahhnnnnn!'

"That sob—his sob—came totally

without warning, rose swiftly to a piercing, falsetto shriek, and ended like the snapping off of a radio.

"Immediately afterward the telephone let loose the most fearful uproar I have ever heard. If you have ever torn wooden packing-boxes to pieces with your hands—you know, fruit crates and the like—and if you can imagine those sharp, rending, splitting sounds magnified and multiplied a millionfold, then you have a faint idea of what I heard over those telephone wires that night. Only it wasn't a box I heard being ripped to pieces; it was a house.

"In the midst of that uproar the phone went dead.

"How I got into my clothes and over to Fothergill's house I don't remember. I was half mad with fear—fear of the unknown, I suppose; my brain wasn't really functioning. But I got to what was left of Fothergill's house. . . .

"That house lay—flat on the ground. It had been burst wide apart, outward, in all directions! Great torn slabs of walls and roof lay all around. Just a moment; I've kept the newspaper clipping."

He got quickly to his feet—a tall, racehorse-slim man with prematurely white hair—walked over to his car and came back with a wallet in his hands. He opened the wallet, extracted a worn and yellowing rectangle of newsprint and handed it to me. I took it gingerly—it was brittle, almost, as a long-dried leaf—and read it aloud.

SAVANT DIES IN MYSTERY BLAST

New Hartford, Conn., Aug. 11—Robert B. Fothergill, 41, unmarried, and an archæologist of international repute, met instant death at about 2:30 a. m. today when an explosion of terrific violence and undetermined origin totally demolished his summer home on the Little River road, two miles from this village.

Fothergill's body was found by Doctor James Bowen of New York City, Fothergill's nearest neighbor and the first person to reach the scene. It had been hurled a distance of over three hundred feet, and examination of the body by Sheriff Ward Donovan and Coroner Arthur White revealed that Fothergill had suffered multiple fractures of the arms and legs, a crushed chest, and a broken neck.

Doctor Bowen revealed that he had been talking on the telephone with Fothergill at the approximate time the blast occurred, that the line abruptly went dead, and that, becoming alarmed, he dressed and walked to Fothergill's home and discovered that the tragedy had already occurred. He states that he heard no explosion, but rather a loud crackling sound. His statement is borne out by neighbors, who declared that the sound resembled "a large box being broken open." Police are inclined to the theory that the blast itself may have been relatively soundless.

Lena Hayes, night telephone operator here, confirmed Doctor Bowen's statement that Fothergill had called him immediately prior to the blast, and that the blast itself terminated the conversation. The telephone, torn from the wall by the force of the explosion, was still clutched in Fothergill's hands when he was found.

State Police are investigating. . . .

THERE was more, but nothing pertinent to this narrative. When I had finished reading the item, Doctor Bowen carefully returned it to his wallet. He had been standing as I read; now he sat down again, and the three of us, oddly evading each other's direct gaze, stared at the triangle of green turf between our feet. Fred Winn began tapping his fingernails on the arm of his lawn-chair.

"The clipping describes it pretty accurately," Doctor Bowen said suddenly. "Fothergill *was* thrown three hundred feet—well over three hundred feet. His body *was* smashed—and hor-

ribly bruised. But that reference to his neck being broken is an understatement. His neck had not only been broken; it had been *wrung* like a chicken's. He was lying flat on his chest when I found him, but his face was looking straight up at me. His eyes were wide open——"

His voice trailed off, then strengthened again as he continued, "Whatever manner of thing burst Fothergill's house that night like a cheesebox deliberately paused to wring his neck. And it did something else, too; it put out the fire. Remember Fothergill said that it hated fire? As it burst out of the house it knocked the fireplace flat, and the walls, too, but before that it crushed out the fire. That's why the wreckage didn't burn."

He stopped, then added heavily, "Funny thing, the jug wasn't even smashed. And it *was* wired in the fireplace, just as Fothergill'd said. The seal had melted out into the ashes, and it was empty."

He sat looking down at the turf at his feet; he was silent for so long that I began to believe he had totally forgotten us. Then he smiled.

"Shall we play quoits?"

My muscles jumped from the sheer casual irrelevance of that question. There was a moment while I did not think at all. Then, in Ethel Barrymore's literal words, I asked uncertainly, "That's all there is? There isn't any more?"

He seemed to hesitate. He rose slowly to his feet, and Fred and I, mechanically aping him, followed. We started toward the quoit pits.

"Yes, there's one thing more," he said, speaking with studied casualness as we walked toward the pits. "But no one would believe this.

"I told you that I was the first person to reach the wreckage of Fothergill's home. Well, there were two large flower-beds bordering the walk, one on each side. They were pretty well grown over with grass and weeds; Fothergill hadn't bothered, that year, to have them replanted and tended. The soil, however, was still soft and loose.

"As I came up Fothergill's walk I saw that the grass and loam in the right-hand flower-bed had been pressed down in a distinct imprint. I looked at that imprint, and even in my haste I stopped and stamped its vague outlines into unrecognizability—so that none who came later would see what I had seen. And by morning, of course, it had been wholly obliterated.

"It was the imprint of the ball and toes of a three-toed foot, and it was bigger than Fothergill's house!"

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The Hound of Pedro

By ROBERT BLOCH

A tale of old Mexico under the Spaniards, of an evil black Moor from Granada, of a dire oppression of the Indians, and a ghastly game of ten-pins played on the desert sands

THEY said he was a wizard, that he could never die. Men whispered that he held traffic with the undead and that his swarthy servants were not of human kind. The Indians murmured their fears of his incredibly wrinkled face in which, they averred, blazed two green eyes that flamed in a manner alien to men. The padres muttered too, and hinted that no mortal could exercise the powers he controlled.

But nobody knew who Black Pedro Dominguez was, or where he had come from. Even today the peons tell their tales of the Spanish oppressor, and mumble fearfully that monstrous climax which has become a legend throughout all Sonora.

It was a spring day in Novorros; that morning of April fifth, 1717. The hot sun beat upon the adobes, the wind whirled dust amidst the cacti. The bells were tolling noon-

tide in the little stone chapel of the mission. Almost it seemed as though they pealed in welcome to the little band of men that rode up through the canyon to Novorros town that noon. Indeed they might, for the shaman's drums had boomed over the western hills the night before, spreading the story of the caballero who rode with his beast of black.

The Yaqui tribesmen filled the streets, their sullen faces illumined by the light of curiosity. The padre and his two brothers of the cloth watched discreetly from the steps of the mission as Black Pedro Dominguez rode into town.

FORTY men and fifty horses smoked through the dust at a gallop. Strange, shining men, faceless in iron armor, straddling snorting steeds—the Indians were curiously impressed. They knew of the *conquistadores* from tales their fathers told; they had seen horses before. But the sight of the burnished steel corselets, the sun-tipped lances, the grilled masks—these things impressed them.

The padre and his brethren were impressed, too, but by more subtle details. They noted the man that rode behind the leader, the tall, lean figure on the white pony whose garb differed curiously from the war-like raiment of his fellows. This thin rider's face was hidden not by steel but by a silken mask; he wore no helmet, but a curious turban. By this and by his light Saracenic armor the priests knew him for a Moor. A Moor of Granada—here!

Then there was the heavy figure on the bay mare, the man who sat uneasily astride as though unused to riding. He wore no helmet, but about his head was wound a scarlet neckerchief. The glitter of his squinting eyes was matched by the sparkle of the gold earrings that dangled at either side of his bearded visage. He carried neither sword nor spear, but in his bloused belt reposed a hilted cutlass, in a scabbard that shone with jewels. The padre recognized him, for he had crossed the Caribbean in a galleon long years ago. This man was a buccaneer.

There were other unusual features which the white men observed while the Yaquis remained in ignorance, but there were two things which both groups noticed, two objects which impressed: Black Pedro Dominguez and his hound.

Had anyone present known of the legend, the camparison would have been irresistible, for Pedro Dominguez was seated on his horse like a malignant Buddha. He was a hog in armor, a swarthy, bearded hog whose porcine jowls were surmounted by a splayed nose and the skull-shadowed eyes of a more carnivorous beast. His forehead was a livid scar; he had been branded there by slave-irons, it seemed. There was something impressive about the man's very obscene ugliness; he *was* Buddha, but Buddha turned demon.

The natives felt it, the priests felt it. Here was evil in man.

Then they saw the hound. A great black shape loped at the heels of Pedro's horse. Huge as a cougar, supple as a panther, black as the velvet of midnight; this was the hound of Pedro. Yellow claws gleamed in the ink of great splayed paws; dark muscles rippled across the enormous belly. The lion-head was jeweled with ruby eyes, and the great slavering jaws opened on a fanged red maw that gaped in hideous hunger.

The natives felt it, the priests felt it. Here was evil in beast.

Black Pedro Dominguez and his hound rode through the town. The cavalcade halted at the mission steps. The priest raised his hands in benediction as Pedro dismounted and stood before him.

The band had traveled far. There was foam on the horses' flanks and dust upon the armor of their riders. Sweat oozed across Black Pedro's scarred forehead. The hound cowered at his feet, moaning, with its tongue lolling like a red serpent.

Therefore as Pedro approached, the padre opened his mouth to invite him into the mission; rest, food, water might be provided.

BEFORE he could speak, Black Pedro growled a greeting. He, he informed the padre, was Pedro Dominguez of Mexico City. He wished nothing from the good father save that he should immediately pronounce the prayers for the dead.

"What is this, sir?" the padre asked. "Can it be that you carry with you the body of some poor man who died unshriven in the desert?"

"No," said Pedro, curtly. "But get along with the prayer." His dark eyes smoldered.

"But I do not understand," the priest continued. "Who is this prayer for?"

"For you—you fool!" Pedro smiled, grim mirth flaming in his eyes. "For you!"

It happened very quickly then. Even as he spoke, Pedro's saber had leaped from the scabbard, risen in Pedro's hand, and descended in flashing fury on the priest's neck. There was a thud and the padre's body lay in red dust. There was a puddle in the little space between head and neck.

Others had seized the two brethren. Daggers flashed in silver sunlight. The black-gowned men dropped beside their superior.

The Yaquis stood silent. Then a vast murmuring arose, a muffled drone of anger. These strangers had killed the white brothers. Knives and bows appeared in brown hands. The tall natives closed in on the mission steps, converging in a red wave.

As if by premeditated signal the little band of whites grouped themselves in a semicircle. Pistols appeared. And as the tribesmen closed in, flame burst upon them. A score dropped, screaming. Another belch of fire. Brown bodies writhed in agony on the dusty ground. The natives turned and fled up the adobe-lined street. The whites remounted, wheeled their steeds, and leveled their lances. Steel shivered through the retreating backs. Swords hacked at heads and shoulders. There were screams and imprecations; horses whinnied and armor clanged. But above all was the sound of grisly laughter as Black Pedro sat quaking on the mission steps. Beside him was the great hound. As the beast began to worry the bodies of the young tribesmen, Pedro laughed anew.

2

THE truce came soon. The Yaquis dragged away the bodies of their slain. Gomez, the mestizo chieftain, parleyed in the mission chapel with Pedro that evening. When he heard Pedro's terms—his command—the old Indian's gray face turned pale with sick rage. He muttered to himself of Yaztan, the great Yaqui leader

to the south. Even now a messenger to Yaztan was on his way, and that champion would raise an army of thousands to march against this invader.

Pedro listened, chuckled. He beckoned to the turbaned figure of the Moor behind him. Smiling with cryptic relish, the Arab bowed and left the room. In a moment he returned, bearing a leathern saddle-bag.

Pedro placed it on the table before him. Then he faced the silent Indian.

"Yaztan," he said. "I have heard of this Yaztan, the mighty chief. Is it not true that he is said to have a ring of gold set within his nose, and has pierced his cheeks with golden bracelets?"

The Indian nodded in assent.

Pedro smiled, looked at the Yaqui without comment, and opened the bag on the table.

SOMETHING shriveled and dry rolled out—something that held the glitter of gold about a crumbled nose and sparkled yellowly in bloodless cheeks. There were no eyes in this—the head of Yaztan.

"I have already visited your chief," Pedro purred. "Before he died he told me of this place; of its mission, and of your tribe's mines. He spoke of your gold, and by the nature of your people's ornaments I see that he spoke truly. Now, as I have said, you will mine this gold for us. You have heard my terms; think them over. Or perhaps you might join Yaztan——"

Thus began the tryranny of Black Pedro; the dreadful days of bondage about which men still whisper.

They tell how Pedro visited the crude native mines, and how he ordered them enlarged and changed so that the labors of his servants might be increased. They speak of the manner in which he conscripted all the able-bodied males of the tribe, so that the women were forced to hunt while their men-folk toiled in the mines, guarded over by the bearded white men with their flame-rods that dealt death to the disobedient and their whips that bloodied the backs of the laggard and weary. They tell also of the gold that was piled in the mission towers, of the ingot-lined chambers at the church where now Black Pedro dwelt.

They speak with shame about the usage accorded their women by Pedro and his men, of Maquila the chieftain's daughter who danced to the stroke of whips in the courtyard when she failed to please the strange dark man who rode behind Black Pedro. They whisper of young virgins who disappeared each month; for with every moon Pedro exacted the tribute of a maiden.

The dark man would come at dusk to the village and demand the girl; then she would ride away to the mission house and disappear. No one dared approach that night, though the screaming sometimes would be borne afar on the lonely wind; no one dared ask next day why the girl did not return.

There was asking at first; the chief's son came, with ten young men. And Pedro scowled at them, while his hirelings seized the youths in sight of the entire tribe. They were stripped and carried to the desert. Here Black Pedro caused holes to be dug in the sand and in these holes were lowered the bodies of the young tribesmen, and earth was heaped around so that they stood buried up to the neck.

Only their heads stood silhouetted

against the sand; only their faces wreathed in wonderment and vague fear. They could not know, dared not guess their fate. Did Pedro mean to leave them here to starve and die? Would they suffer hunger, thirst, the torment of heat? Would the wheeling vultures come to feast?

THE tribe watched, impassive, held in check by Pedro's crew. They saw Pedro conversing with the dark man, and the swarthy squint-eyed one with the rings in his ears. They heard Pedro whisper to the squint-eyed one, and he laughed terribly and cursed in his outlandish tongue.

Then Black Pedro motioned to his soldiers, and they forced the throng away. There were fathers, mothers, wives, children of the ten young braves in that group; they were herded back with the rest.

Ten pairs of eyes followed them—ten pairs of eyes from heads set in the sand. Hopeless, helpless eyes.

The men escorted the savages back to the village. Pedro, the dark man, and the squint-eyed lieutenant remained all alone with the buried, living heads.

What occurred in the next few hours could never be rightly known. But the Yaquis could guess. For there were terrible hintings.

Several soldiers went into the convent and presently returned carrying great wooden balls of hardened fiber. These they carried back into the desert.

The savages had seen Pedro roll these balls along the inner lawn of the convent garden at times; he and the dark man were adept at bowling.

The balls were carried with them into the desert. Perhaps that was what Pedro had whispered to make the others laugh. He might have conceived a jest.

Ten-pins. Ten heads.

The heavy wooden balls rumbled thunderously as they rolled across the flat sands. The sound of human screams rose unmistakably over the booming.

When Pedro and his companions returned it was already dark. Their faces were flushed as though from exertion. When the released tribesmen hastened out to the desert, they could find no trace of heads in the sand. The men had vanished. But in the twilight when Black Pedro returned, they had seen ominous stains on the wooden bowling-balls.

The natives asked no questions, but their scowls deepened to the impassive malignity of the savage enraged. They dared not search the spot or linger to dig up that which they suspected lay beneath the sands; dared not search because it was night.

At night, Pedro's hound was abroad. It roamed their village at will, descended even to the mines where they toiled under the lash by day. When hungry, the beast sprang on the native nearest—unless an alert white guard beat it off in time. Sometimes the guard would not bother to repulse the hound if the attacked native was old and feeble.

That hound. . . .

The Yaquis feared it more than they did their vicious but human master. They began to conceive queer fancies connected with both of these oppressors. These fancies were based on their scanty knowledge of what went on behind the convent walls where Pedro and his men lived in guarded seclusion. No one entered the place save to be conducted into dungeons and torture chambers be-

low, but rumors spread. It was guessed that Pedro's band had come from Mexico, lured by tales of mines and yellow metal. How long he would stay here none could say, but the gold was piling up daily in the chapel rooms. A few old natives had been detailed to tend it there, and they started the disturbing rumors of life within the walls.

The dark man, they said, was a shaman—a wizard. It was he who advised Pedro, the old natives whispered; and it was he who tended the torture vaults in the abandoned cellars below the former mission. Victims came from the mines; disobedient natives were taken here and "punished" before their reward of death.

But (so hinted the oldsters) they were "punished" as a wizard would chastize; they were sacrificed, and their bodies rended in terrible ways.

It was the dark man, too, that demanded the virgin every moon. She was led into the cellars, the old Indians averred, and given in sacrifice where none could see. The dark man and Black Pedro and the hound went down into those depths with her, and there would be the sound of chanting and praying, the screams of the girl mingled with the baying of that sable beast.

The old ones cautiously spoke of how the hound would re-emerge after this and slink off into outer darkness, but they said Pedro and the dark man remained below for several days. When the hound returned they ventured abroad once more, to hear tales of new atrocities committed without the mission walls.

Some of the tribe believed these old ones in their mutterings. Certainly they came to fear Black Pedro and his great dog increasingly as the months went by. And the secret messengers they had sent to the south gave no word.

But even the most credulous refused to believe the wilder stories of Pedro speaking to the dog, and the animal replying in human tongue. Nevertheless a growing panic manifested itself in tribal ranks. There was talk of fleeing, but this was impossible. Uprising was out of the question; in truth, the men with the flame-rods were not over-cruel—it was Pedro, the dark man, and the strange beast that reveled in brutality.

PANIC increased the rumors so that Pedro and his hound became almost legendary figures of evil. The two were almost alike in their animal lusts; dreadful things were hinted as to the fate of the maiden taken each month—tales of bestial passion and the old shaman stories of the uses accorded virgin blood. These stories drew added color from the almost human attributes displayed at times by the hound. If it could not talk to its master as the wildest stories reputed, it could at least understand human speech and make itself understood.

The Yaquis began to realize that on nights following the monthly ceremonies the great black hound prowled about their adobes; that it listened below windows and lurked amidst the shadows beyond their campfires.

For whenever there was midnight talk of rebellion and discontent Black Pedro knew of it, and summoned the speaker to the mission. Could it be that the beast actually *reported* these things? Or was it the wizardry of the strange dark man?

None knew the truth, but each passing day the shadow of Pedro and his hound loomed larger over all their

lives. And far away the messengers sped south to spread the tale.

3

Don Manuel Digron halted his march at the head of the canyon. Signal fires smoked in the dusk, and the three emissaries were waiting as the messengers had said.

They held a secret parley in the darkness, while Don Manuel listened to the natives' story. He scowled deeply as he heard, then broached his plan of action. The Yaquis nodded, then faded away in the gloom of the twilight canyons.

The men-at-arms dismounted, encamped. Don Manuel Digron kept counsel with his aide, Diego.

"Sure it is the same man," he growled. "This is Black Pedro Dominguez of whom they speak. Friar Orspito tells me that this Pedro is long wedded to the Devil, for the Holy Inquisition seeks him even now in Mother Spain. He fled from there with the Moor, Abouri—a black wizard of Granada; men tell of their exploits. The hound Pedro rules is not an earthly thing, I warrant, if tales I've heard are true."

"What does such a man here?" Diego inquired. A frown crossed Don Manuel's lean face.

"I know not. He left Mexico City—he and his band of freebooters and gutter-rats—no doubt the smell of gold lured him across the plains to Sonora. It is always so. With gold he and his damned sorcerer can command an empire."

"Are we to turn him over to Mother Church or the civil authorities?" asked Diego.

"Neither," Manuel drawled. "We have no horses to convey forty captives across the desert, nor water and provisions to sustain them. They must be disposed of here—and if half the tales of evil magic be true, it is God's work to do this."

The Don stared at the fire for a moment, then continued.

"We may taste of necromancy tonight, Diego. The chieftains inform me that this is the eve appointed for sacrifice. A living maiden is delivered to him once each moon. I trust our arrival is timely; I do not care to ponder on the usage accorded a woman by these sorcerous swine."

The two men ate and drank.

4

Two men ate and drank within the mission walls. Black Pedro dined tonight with Abouri, the Moor; they toasted gold and goety alike from amber goblets.

There was little of speech between them, but many a glance of dark understanding. The Moor smiled after a long silence, and lifted his glass.

"Fortune!" he pledged.

Pedro sneered, his little pig-eyes sullen with discontent.

"When shall we leave this cursed hole, Abouri? I long for cities where there is no sun to dry the juices from my body; we've gold enough to ransom the kings of all the world. Why tarry?"

The Moor pursed his lips urbanely as he stroked his graying beard, and his smile was placating.

"Patience," he counseled. "Be guided by my wisdom, O brother. Was it not I who led you from the galleys to riches beyond all dreams? Did we not pledge a pact before Ahriman, your Sathanas; has not He guided us on our way?"

"True." Pedro was thoughtful.

"I have brought you wealth," pursued the Moor. "And I must have my due, as our bond with your Lucifer demands. Here we have found the blood of maidens and other useful things, and I may carry out my bargain undisturbed. That was our agreement with the Master before the Altar—wealth for you, and mantic power for me, and souls for Him."

Strange fear flooded Pedro's face.

" 'Tis a dreadful pledge," he half whispered. "Souls for Him! And at what price! For the hound frightens me, and I am afraid when the exchange is made; should anything go amiss——"

The Moor raised his hand in a gesture of restraint. "That was the bond. The hound is His; He gave it to us as an instrument to secure souls for His Devil's bondage. A few days each month is little enough to ask in return for wealth. And yours is a nature to delight in the shedding of blood."

"As a man, yes—I warrant I find pleasure enough in slaying," Pedro admitted, with utter candor. "But as the other——"

Again the Moor checked his companion's speech. "Here is the maiden now, and we must prepare for this night's work."

Two trembling natives had entered the room, pushing a bound and frightened girl before them. She struggled in her bonds once they freed her legs, but they took no heed. Bowing low, they averted their faces and ran out. The Moor rose and approached the dark, lithe figure of the Indian maiden. As his hands grasped her pinioned arms she closed her eyes in utter fear.

Black Pedro leered, laughing.

"A fine wench, indeed!" he chuckled. "Could I but——"

"No," declared the Moor, sensing his purpose. "She must remain immaculate for the sacrifice. Come."

All mirth, all desire, vanished from Pedro's face as he followed the Moor and his captive down the winding stairs to the cellar crypts below. He knew what was to happen, and he was afraid.

There was nothing to reassure him in the dungeon itself. A vast, gloomy chamber, taper-litten, it was an oddly terrifying place.

Corridors stretched off into further gloom. Here were to be found the cages and the racks for prisoners, but the Moor did not go on. Instead he proceeded down the center of the main chamber to the further wall, where stood a great table and two flat rocks. There had been an altar here once, but it had since been removed and the crucifix above it inverted. An inverted crescent was emblazoned against it.

The girl was placed on the table. Braziers and flares were lit; alembics lifted to the light. Bubble-glass jars were hung over the fires, and a tripod sent pungent incense through the room in swirls of spiced smoke.

Tightly the girl was bound. Strongly the basin was held. Swiftly the knife was plunged. And a shriek, a moan, then bubble, bubble, bubble, as the basin filled.

Incense added, red and yellow powders filled the basin as it hung over the tripod. Black Pedro's swarthy face was pale, and sweat spurted across his gashed brows. The Moor ignored him as he worked over the flames.

Black horror loped into the room as the great dark hound slunk pur-

posefully down the stairs. With prescient intelligence it stalked to the further of the two stone slabs and took its place upon it. Pedro reluctantly followed suit, mounting the second slab.

And then the Moor took up the basin, filled with red and silver bubbles that glistened in the light. And the tapers were snuffed out so that darkness fell upon the crypt, and only a strange red light flamed forth from the basin in the wizard's hands. That, and the emberous glow from the hound's deep eyes. . . .

The hound lapped at the basin's contents with a long red tongue. Pedro sipped, his lips ashen with terror. The Moor stood beneath the cross and crescent in the pulsing darkness. He raised his arms in a gesture of invocation as man and beast sank into coma deep as death. Sibilantly came the wizard's prayer.

"Ahriman, Lord of Beasts and Men——"

5

His sword was crimson when Manuel Digron raced down the darkened stairs. Behind him lay nightmare; nightmare and screaming death in the black reaches of the mission walls. The men-at-arms slew swiftly, but the Yaquis remained to mangle and maim in bloody attack.

The surprise attack had been successful. The Indians and the Spaniards had converged on the mission, and the forty were slain—murdered in their beds, for the most part; though a few had put up stout resistance under the leadership of the buccaneer.

Now Don Manuel Digron sought the cellar, with Diego and his lieutenants at his heels. The torches brought light as they rounded the curve in the stairs, and for a moment Manuel stared aghast.

The dead, bloodless thing lay on the table. Before it stood a turbaned figure, rapt in prayer; and behind it the two dreadful slabs of stone, on which lay a man and a gigantic hound. The lips of the hound and the lips of the man were alike bloody. And the hound squatted in a dreadfully man-like fashion, while the man crouched. It was unnatural, that tableau.

At Manuel's descent, turmoil came. The Moor looked up and wheeled about, snatching a dagger from his scarved waist. Manuel dodged the descending weapon and thrust his sword upward so that it pierced the dark man's belly.

Then it ripped upward dreadfully, so that a crimson-gray torrent gushed forth from the side, and the Moor dropped writhing into death.

Then Manuel advanced to the slab where Black Pedro Dominguez lay. The great swarthy man cringed and gibbered, but drew no weapon. Instead he cowered, whimpering like a beast when Manuel's sword ran him through.

Manuel turned upon the hound, but the great beast had already sprung. Two men-at-arms stood on the stairs, and it leaped for the first one's throat. He fell, and beast-jaws crunched. The mighty creature turned as the other soldier raised his lance. A great paw brushed spear and shield aside; then talons ripped into the man's face and left behind only a furrow of bleeding horror.

The hound was silent, ghastly silent; it did not growl or bay. Instead it turned and rose. On two hind legs it stood, in monstrous simulation of humanity; then it turned and raced up the

stairs in frantic flight. Manuel stumbled, recovered a moment later.

The rest was never quite real to him. He lay still for but a moment, listening to the groans of the dying wizard on the crypt floor, but what he heard haunted him forever.

Babblings of black delirium . . . hints of a monstrous exchange the wizard made monthly after a blood sacrifice to Ahriman . . . tales of a lycanthropic pact whereby the bodies of Black Pedro and the Devil's hound held alien souls for days following the sacrifice, when the hound that was not a hound ravened forth for souls given to Satan in return for gold and gifts . . . the cracked voice of the sorcerer, telling of a rite just concluded . . . the monthly exchange just made through blood and prayers, and a werewolf serving Evil loosed upon the world once more to seek souls for the Master . . . delirium or truth?

It was then that Manuel understood and screamed aloud as he jerked erect, glaring with horrified eyes at the feebly writhing body of the Moor. Shuddering, he whirled and sprang up the stairs in pursuit of the hound.

His soldiers met him. The Indians, they said, had captured the black beast as it raced into view from the depths. A Yaqui lay dead on the floor, his throat ribboned in mute testimony to the hound's ferocity. And now Manuel could hear drums dinning in the hills, throbbing blood-lust.

He was muttering long-forgotten prayers as he ran toward where the red glare flickered, muttering prayers as he whipped the sword from his scabbard. A Yaqui death-chant, grim and relentless, boomed out into the savage night. Then Manuel plunged over the brow of the hill—and saw.

He saw that the Yaquis had remembered the deaths of their ten young men; they had remembered the ghastly jest of Black Pedro. And since he was dead, they were repeating that jest with Pedro's hound. He saw the dark head buried in sand to its shaggy throat, heard the thunder of wooden balls as they bowled along the sand, as they plunged unerringly at the screaming horror that was their target.

Manuel fell upon the natives. Snarling curses that somehow kept him sane, he and his men drove them back with the flats of their swords. And at last, alone, Manuel dared to approach the thing in the sand—the black, jutting head that lifted its foaming muzzle to the skies as it moaned in that last agony.

But Manuel, knowing what he did, dared not look at it. The wizard's dying whispers had been too much.

He gave only a swift, furtive glance as in mercy he thrust his sword through the ruined beast-skull. And as he stabbed, his heart went icy cold. He had seen the smashed jaws move feebly in one final effort as the dazed eyes glared into his own. Then, above the muffled, triumphant thunder of the distant drums, Don Manuel heard that which confirmed all the legends and rumors of which the wizard had hinted.

Don Miguel heard the incredible voice, then collapsed beside the dying beast-head with the sound still dinning in his ears.

The hound of horror spoke.

And it moaned, *"Mercy—a prayer for the dead—for me—Black Pedro."*

"He stared like a man hypnotized."

The Thing in the Trunk

By PAUL ERNST

A fascinating story about a heinous crime and its strange aftermath—by the author of "A Witch's Curse" and other weird thrill-tales

SOMEHOW or other, the cat was the worst feature of this whole thing.

Now that it was all over, the stark motionlessness of that which only a little while before had been a living woman did not trouble him so much. But that damned cat!

"Get out!" he rasped. "Scat!"

The cat slunk back, eyes slitted warily, but did not leave the room.

It was a standard living-room in a standard small bungalow. An overstuffed chair stood in a corner with a floor-lamp beside it. Opposite the chair, along one wall, was a divan to match. A gate-legged table stood between the front windows—the blinds of which were very carefully drawn. More furniture, decorous, showing modest prosperity, was piled along the walls, leaving the center of the room clear.

The rugs had been rolled back from the center of the room. In their place was a large, waterproof blanket. On the blanket was the body.

George Opper ducked his head to wipe perspiration from his face onto the sleeve of his shirt. He was a big man, a bit too heavy, with a face that was normally florid. It was very pale, now.

THE cat, a sleek white animal, sidled toward the body on the waterproof blanket. With almost a sob, George Opper raised his hand to throw his gun at it. But he stayed the impulse. The gun, perhaps striking wall or floor, might leave a trace of violence for later investigators to seize upon. He didn't want that.

He had been very careful about that so far. He mustn't let his unstrung nerves give him away now.

He had been very careful about the whole thing, as far as that went. Martia, his wife, had come home secretly at midnight, from the next state where she had been visiting her mother. It had not been hard to do. A wire, given a messenger boy on the street by a man whose hat was pulled down and collar pulled up so that recognition was impossible.

MARTIA. I AM IN TROUBLE STOP COME BACK BUT LET NO ONE KNOW YOU ARE COMING STOP EXPLAIN LATER.

The wire might come out afterward, but it was improbable. In any event, it couldn't hurt him much. As far as the world knew, his wife had simply left her mother's home—and disappeared. He would let a year go by, however, before he married Lois Blye. Too much hurry would look suspicious.

He wiped his face on his shirtsleeve again, and stared at the thing on the blanket. Pretty soon it would be sunk for ever from the world of men. And then he would be safe. No body, no crime. . . .

"Scat!" he almost screamed.

The sleek white cat was back at the blanket, whiskers almost touching the body of its mistress. Devoted to Martia, the cat had been. The dumb brute didn't seem to sense the change wrought by death; seemed sidling up for caresses from the still white hand.

Opper leaped toward the thing, and kicked out at it. The cat jumped for the doorway, but stayed there, staring out of green eyes, tongue going over its chops.

Opper composed his quivering, raw nerves, and approached the blanket. Time to get going. Time to get this thing out of here. The cat was just behind him. He took a quick step backward and nearly tripped over the animal.

He stood still, hands clenched till the nails drew blood, yelling, screaming behind closed lips so that only a curious small whimpering noise came from his mouth. But he stopped that in a hurry. That was actually horrifying. Martia had whimpered like that just before he killed her.

A queerly terrifying thing, that al-

most inaudible whimper of Martia's. She had stood in the doorway of the living-room, hat and coat still on, staring in alarm and concern at Opper.

"George! I got your wire. Luckily not a soul saw me get in. What on earth has happened? What trouble are you in? The bank? Funds gone? What is it?"

He had said nothing, and slowly, as she stared at him, the color had drained from her face. Drop by drop it had seemed to recede, leaving her skin like blue snow. She had read his intention in his eyes as clearly as if he had shouted it at her. He had expected her to try to scream. He had been ready to whip the silenced gun from behind him and cut off the betraying scream before it could get started.

But she hadn't screamed. And she hadn't moved. She had simply stood there in the doorway, swaying a bit, eyes wide—while from her blanched lips came the small, almost inaudible whimper.

Just that little whimper, like a distillation of all the screams for help and mercy human beings have given into the quivering air since time began. It had made his blood run cold, that odd little whimper.

He couldn't figure out even now how he had summoned strength to raise the gun and fire it with the animal-like whimper seeping against his eardrums and with Martia's wide, glazed eyes staring at him. But he had.

"And I'd do it again," he said suddenly, aloud. "The stakes are worth it."

The stakes—Lois Blye.

Lois was as lovely as—as hell itself—with her amber eyes and her sinuous body. Lois seemed to think a great deal of the heavily good-looking assistant cashier of the Nortown Bank. And Lois was wealthy. Marriage to her would relieve George of the bank work he hated—of all work, for that matter, if he wished. . . .

He cursed in a shrill whisper, and kicked out at the cat again. It leaped from its mistress' dead body, and this time fled from the room as Opper jumped after it. One bloody paw-mark was left on the bare floor. . . .

"The thing will hang me yet!" he whispered, moistening dry lips with his tongue while he wiped away the damning mark. "Wandering around the neighborhood with blood on it——"

But he shrugged as he remembered how cats clean themselves. In a little while the animal would have licked from its paw any of the blood it might have touched from the small clean hole in Martia's breast. If some remained—it would not be too serious. Cats are always digging into things, or killing mice. Blood would be explainable.

He approached the body on the blanket once more. He must get away quickly.

He was supposed to be five hundred miles from here, starting his two weeks' vacation. He mustn't risk being seen here at home.

He wrapped around the still figure the blanket which had kept all blood from the floor, compressing the thing as much as he could, moving with great care lest he get a spot of blood on clothes or shoes. Then, shivering, he picked up the bundle and walked to the side door of the living-room. He snapped out the lights so that no illuminated doorway could reveal him when he opened the door. He went out to his sedan, parked without lights in the side entrance where trees and bushes screened it utterly from the sight of his nearest neighbor—should that neigh-

bor chance to be awake at half-past three in the morning.

The sedan had never been seen by anyone in his possession before. He had bought it only a few days ago, a big, old-fashioned, fourth-hand thing, for just this occasion. He had bought it principally because of its trunk arrangement: on a sturdy rack at the rear was a stout metal oblong for luggage which could be removed from the car.

The new cars had the rear trunk incorporated into the body, which would not have done at all.

The trunk was black-enameled and very strong. George Opper had further strengthened it by putting on it a heavy, case-hardened lock to replace the sturdy but lighter one that had originally secured the lid.

The twin suitcases were out of the trunk. Its emptiness yawned at him as he lifted the strong lid. Sweating, shivering, he forced the bundle he carried into the trunk. It was a devilish job, but when he had finished there was an amazing amount of space left. The difficulty had arisen only from the unyieldiness of the bundle, not so much from its size.

He went back to the living-room, snapping the lights on as he closed the door. He thought he would go mad if he saw the cat again. But the cat was not there, and he went on with his work.

He unrolled the rugs and put them back in place, after first making sure no stains were on the bare floor. He put the various articles of furniture back where they belonged. Then, in a sudden revulsion of feeling, he dropped into the easy-chair.

He shook all over. Perspiration poured from him in a weak, icy flood. His teeth chattered. He was on the verge of fainting away, like a nervous girl.

He swore at himself. What in thunder was the matter with him? It was all done. He had not been tripped up in any way, and he would continue to go undetected. The first, and infinitely the hardest, part of his job was done. Now all he had to do was get away before the sky began to lighten and the newspaper delivery boys and the milk-men stirred.

But for fully five minutes he cowered in the chair before he finally got up and staggered to the side door. He turned out the lights, waited an instant, and opened the door. He stood there in darkness, a dim figure.

From the darkness of the room behind him came a sound that for an instant almost stopped his heart.

A faint, quavering whimper.

God! That was the way Martia had whimpered as he stared at her with the gun in his hand and death in his eyes. She had stood in the doorway, paralyzed with horror, while from her blanched lips came the whimpering sound. . . .

But after a few seconds the terror passed. The cat! After almost driving him mad while he moved about the living-room, the fiendish thing was now prowling the dark, mewing a little for its mistress.

Now that his fear had subsided, Opper was glad the incident had occurred. He had almost slipped here. Imagine locking the house with that cat in it as a mute witness that someone had been in this place at a time when no one was supposed to have entered it! The animal was supposed to be out in the garage, where a half-opened window afforded it entrance and exit, and where food was spread to last it the few days

till Martia was due back from her mother's. Had its starved yowling attracted the attention of outsiders, the whole show might have been given away!

He called it softly, "Puss, puss, puss. Here, puss."

Green eyes glowed dimly at him from the living-room doorway, where Martia had stood. But the cat stayed stubbornly there. The thing had always disliked him.

"Puss, puss!"

The green eyes moved a little, but moved away instead of toward him. Opper felt an insane desire to shriek laughter. To stand here calling a cat after what had happened! . . .

A choking sob of fear and rage gagged him an instant later. He cursed the dim green eyes in a harsh, strangling whisper. Then he calmed. He drew his pocket-knife out and threw it. The knife landed behind the cat, in the hall. The animal whimpered again, and Opper saw a dim shadow streak out the side door.

He staggered with relief, and felt for his knife in the hall till he found it. He went to the side door, closed and locked it, and stepped to the vague bulk which was the sedan. Quickly he slammed down the lid of the trunk and locked it.

He got into the car and released the emergency brake. The drive to his house sloped down a little to the street. He coasted down the slope, silent as a shadow, and rolled nearly half a block before his momentum died. Then, with all need for silence past, he started the motor and purred softly down the street toward the state highway.

But before he left the city limits, he stopped his sedan beside a corner curbing. He took the trunk key from his key ring and dropped it down the sewer grating there, with a rasping sigh tearing from his lips as it tinkled to oblivion.

Now he was completely, utterly safe.

2

In the pink light of early morning, Opper drove at a modest speed along the broad concrete fifty miles from his home. He kept the speedometer needle under the forty-five-mile mark primarily because being arrested for speeding was a thing too fraught with risk to contemplate without a shudder, but secondarily because the even, effortless pace gave him a chance to relax and rest.

Visions of Lois filled his brain now, as he rolled smoothly farther and farther from danger.

Lois in a tennis frock, throat bared, amber eyes gazing provocatively at him. Lois in that cloth-of-gold thing she'd worn last week at the supper club, with men clustering around her like flies around honey. Lois placing her hands lightly on his cheeks and saying: "You're thrilling, my darling, but you have a wife. And I won't be anything to you—but wife."

Lois! Wealthy, beautiful, ruthlessly passionate but ruthlessly determined only on marriage!

Opper's hands tightened on the steering-wheel.

If Martia only had used sense! But she hadn't. She had grown hysterical when divorce was even mentioned. So he'd had to pack her off to her mother's house, with a vague idea in mind of how to get Lois anyhow. And he'd had to call her home again with definite, crystallized plans in his mind.

And now it was done. In the metal trunk on the rack behind him the Martia who had hysterically refused to lis-

ten to reason was being borne to eternal oblivion. No one would ever hear of her again. She would just—disappear.

Opper's lips jerked nervously, with something like a grin.

A little more than four hundred miles away, near the resort where he was supposed to be at the moment, was a great swamp. The muck of this swamp, in places, was bottomless. Anything thrown into the muck sank beyond possible recovery, to lie in slimy darkness for the rest of time.

Bottomless! He should know. He had spent his boyhood near the swamp. He had seen animals flounder in there, never to be glimpsed again. He'd heaved boulders into it, and watched while they sank slowly, soundlessly.

He glanced at his watch. In ten hours of easy driving he'd be beside the swamp. After a wait, with black night shrouding him, he would unfasten the metal trunk on the rack behind, and throw it into the muck with his silenced gun also within it.

As easy as that.

Trunk and body and gun would sink to eternal darkness. And George Opper, in a year or so, with the world convinced that Martia Opper had run off secretly with another man, would marry Lois Blye.

So he drove along the deserted highway, hat off while the morning breeze bathed his forehead, resting and thinking of Lois. And his sedan looked like any other rather outmoded sedan of a biggish sort. And the big metal trunk on the rear rack gleamed dully in the rising sun, giving no hint whatever of the burden it contained. . . .

At about seven o'clock, the dash indicator showed that he needed gasoline. He started to turn into a big filling-station in a town that he was passing through, decided against it, and went on to the open country till he hit an obscure, single-pump station in front of a crossroads store. He stopped beside the pump and a young fellow in overalls came out.

"Fill the t——" Opper began.

Then he stopped. His breath whistled between his teeth, and his face went pasty white.

Till this moment he had forgotten something. The gasoline tank was in the rear of the car, under the trunk. The gas intake was right beside it.

"You want it filled, you say?" the boy asked, staring curiously.

"Yes," faltered Opper, swallowing. "Yes."

He had to have gas, regardless of the position of the gasoline intake. The boy went to the rear of the car. Opper got from behind the steering-wheel and walked back, too, on legs that trembled.

He watched the boy's hands. They were brushing against the trunk. The intake cap stuck a little. Finally it came loose, and the lad's hand thumped against the trunk with the suddenness of it. The trunk gave out a dead, muffled sound.

Opper's teeth almost met in his lower lip. Sweat was dewing his forehead, feeling clammy in the cool of the morning.

"How many will she take?" said the boy.

"About twelve gallons," George Opper heard himself say. His voice had an odd muffled sound, as though he stood far off and heard it through a thin partition.

The boy inserted the bronze hose-nozzle into the intake pipe and carelessly draped the hose over the trunk. And then Opper heard it.

A faint, almost inaudible whimper

from the trunk, like the distillation of all the screams of horror uttered by human lips since time began.

For one bad instant Opper thought he was going to faint, there beside the car. He clutched wildly at the fender, leaned heavily against it.

The whimper sounded again, distinct over the swish of gas through the hose—just as Martia had whimpered as she stood in the doorway waiting for death.

"Twelve gallons," called the boy. "Hey—what's the matter?"

He jumped to Opper's side.

"Heart——" gasped Opper. "It acts up like this sometimes. Yes, twelve gallons is all right."

He clung, panting, to the fender.

The whimper sounded again.

"Water——" said Opper loudly. It was almost a scream. "Get me a glass of water right away. Then I'll be all right. Hurry!"

The whimper fought faintly against his loud, shrill words. But he drowned the faint sound out—or thought he did.

"You're sure——" began the boy doubtfully.

"Yes, yes!" Opper almost shouted, drowning out the ghastly whimper. "Hurry! Water!"

THE LAD ran toward the little store. Opper leaped to the tank. He pulled out the gasoline hose, spilling the fluid remaining in it over the ground. He screwed on the cap with trembling fingers. And as he moved, the whimper kept sounding faintly in his ears.

That half-paralyzed small cry for mercy! Just the kind of cry that had come from Martia's white lips as she swayed in the doorway and stared into his eyes.

He dragged his billfold from his pocket and got behind the steering-wheel. Not till then did he realize just what had happened.

The animal-like little whimper hadn't come from the lips of the dead. It was as truly animal as it sounded.

Across his reeling brain shot the picture of the sleek white cat streaking out the side door just before he had come out himself and shut and locked the trunk. The cat, still seeking to be near its mistress. . . .

He had shut the cat in the trunk with the body!

He kicked the starter. The motor caught. He raced it till the hood shook, in an effort to drown out the mewling whimper of the thing behind.

The boy came out of the store with a glass of water in his hand. He gaped at Opper, then began to run toward the car.

"In a hurry!" Opper yelled above the roar of the motor, and the whimper. "Here's for the gas. Keep the change."

"But if you're sick——" protested the boy.

"That's it. Got to get to town and see a doctor."

Opper snapped the clutch out and the car leaped toward the road.

"It's *that* way to the nearest town," he heard the lad call as he turned the sedan's wheels down the road away from the village he'd just passed through.

Then he was alone on the road again, shaking like a leaf, teeth chattering, moans coming from behind his compressed lips. He was almost done in when he stopped the car at the side of the road around the first bend from the gas station. He slumped forward over the wheel with his forehead resting on his clenched fists.

The first shock of hearing that whimpering and thinking it came from Mar-

tia's lifeless lips had been almost more than he could bear. But the following realization that the sound was actual—and coming from the damned creature he had inadvertently locked in with the corpse—had been almost as unnerving.

He moved his hands so that they covered his distorted mouth, and gnawed at his knuckles. The cat—in there—with the doubled-up bundle. . . .

"Oh God!" he whispered.

What was he to do? He couldn't drive along all day, passing through towns, stopping for gas and oil, with that half-dead animal mewling and whimpering in the trunk.

The tinkle of the trunk key as it fell down the sewer grating rang mockingly in his ears.

He'd thought he had been so clever when he threw the key away. In some totally unforeseen emergency in which he might be stopped and a demand made that he open the trunk, he could say, and a search would prove, that he had lost the key. That had been his idea. He would throw the trunk, still locked and with the key unrecoverable, into the swamp muck.

But now, in the trunk, was that horrible half-dead thing, whining and whimpering, locked in and with the key thrown away. . . .

What *was* he to do?

Drawing a long, uncertain breath, Opper got out of the car and lifted the front seat to get at his tool kit. There was only one thing he could think of to do.

That was to break the trunk open, free the cat, and then flee along his way to the concealing swamp.

The bottomless muck. Thought of it was like a tonic. If only he were beside it now!

The tools in the kit were ridiculously inadequate, as are tools in most automobile kits nowadays. There was a screw-driver with a cracked wooden handle, a pair of pliers, some wrenches too light to be used as hammers, and a jack with a separate round of wood for a handle.

He took the meager array to the back of the car. He listened. The whimper was not sounding at the moment. Maybe the cat was dead.

But he couldn't entertain that comforting hope, much as he'd have liked to. Enough air filtered into the trunk to keep the animal from smothering. It could live in there for days.

Opper gripped the screw-driver till his knuckles showed white. He inserted the flat edge under the lock and pried up. The screw-driver bent a little, that was all. Under a harder tug, the handle cracked entirely apart under his straining fingers. He cursed wildly as the wooden bits fell to the ground. Lock and trunk were scarcely marred by the pressure.

He had paid especial attention to the strength of this trunk when he bought the car. The lock he'd had put on it was more impregnable than the metal panels of the trunk itself. Well, he'd gotten the thing strong enough, all right!

But he had to get in there. He had to free that cat before it betrayed him.

He set his jaws hard as he thought of the animal. By God, it would be a pleasure to kill the thing. He'd have had to kill it in any event. Couldn't have it roaming loose. He'd have to kill it and hide it. A pleasure. . . .

He attacked the heavy lock with the pliers.

The whimper was sounding again, half animal, half human in its anguish, like a faint echo of all humanity's cries of terror, so like Martia's whimper be-

fore the bullet struck her that Opper could hardly stand it.

Frantically he gripped the lock with the pliers and wrenched back. The rusted jaws slipped off the lock and he fell to his knees. He jumped up and bent over the lock.

It was scratched a little, that was all.

Opper hammered at the lock with the pliers and with the wooden jack-handle. It was like the effort of a child to open a bank vault. After a few minutes of it, with the sound of his blows ringing over the empty fields around him, he stopped.

The whimpering of the trapped thing in the trunk was sounding louder. The hammering had frightened it.

Opper snatched up the metal shank of the screw-driver and reached across the trunk to its hinges. He caught up the heavy, unwieldy jack. The hinges were almost concealed by the rear trunk panel, but he located them. He placed the shank of the screw-driver against one of them and pounded with the jack.

A long, jagged dent leaped into being next to the hinge. The hinge itself bent a little, but was not noticeably injured.

He lost his head a little and hammered wildly, frenziedly at it, with the whimper maddening his ears between blows. The hinge didn't bend any more. Hysterically he raised the jack and brought it down with all his strength on top of the trunk.

The top sagged inward in a deep dent, with a slight hole appearing where the corner of the jack's base had struck.

"My God, no!" Opper chattered aloud, staring at the tiny hole. "Not that way! Somebody could see in!"

Panic-stricken, he battered at the metal around the little hole, trying to force the jagged edges together. Then he stopped abruptly as the sound of a slowing motor came to his ears.

He stared back along the road and saw a battered small car coasting toward him. A leathery-faced man at the wheel was staring first at him and then at the trunk. The man got out of the car and walked toward the sedan. Opper saw a star pinned to his vest, glinting as the lapel of his coat twitched with his walking.

3

WITH DEATH in his heart, Opper faced the man and forced a smile.

"Let my temper get the best of me," he said loudly. The whimper had stopped for the moment, but it might sound faintly again at any time. "I've lost the key to this trunk, and I was trying to break into it."

"So I see," said the man, his leathery face expressionless.

His level eyes went again from Opper to the trunk.

"Kind of funny, you stopping 'way out here on the road and trying to hammer a trunk open," he said.

"There's nothing funny about it," Opper retorted. He wrenched his eyes from the tiny hole in the trunk's top. If you got right over that hole and looked down hard, you might see—— "I've lost the key and I want to get into it. That's all. I—I have some route maps in there, and I need them for my day's drive."

"Route maps? You can get those at any filling-station."

"I know," Opper nodded, smiling till his jaws ached. "I thought of that after I'd started to break open the trunk. But then, as I said, I rather lost my temper and gave it a bang on the lid."

"I should think you'd stop at some

locksmith's and have *him* open the trunk, instead of breaking it all up."

Opper said nothing. The thought of someone's opening the trunk made icy moisture ooze out on the palms of his hands.

"Sure this is your trunk?" the man droned flatly.

"What business is it of——"

"I'm the sheriff around here. You're sure it's your trunk—and your car?"

"Why, of course," Opper began pompously. Then his teeth went on edge as the sound he had been dreading came faintly forth.

The ghastly whimper from the trunk.

"Certainly it's my car," he chattered quickly, his voice loud and shrill. "I have papers and identification of every kind. And there's a tag on my key-ring with my initials on it—just step up here and I'll show you."

He caught the sheriff by the shoulder and began impelling him toward the front of the car, away from the trunk.

"What the hell!" exclaimed the sheriff, breaking away. "Are you crazy? Let's see your identification——"

"Of course! Of course! Just step up in front, here, and I'll show you my card of ownership and driving-license with my signature on it——"

"All right, I'm not deaf," snapped the sheriff.

But he walked after Opper, away from the rear of the sedan, to Opper's almost fainting relief. That ghostly, horrible whimper. . . .

Away from the trunk, with the whimper sounding so low that he was not sure he was hearing it himself, Opper began to realize from a practical standpoint just what was happening here.

Give name, address, and license numbers to an officer of the law? How fine that would be if anything slipped in the future and he were brought into court!

He began to tremble again, but managed to conceal it from the man's keen eyes. At least he hoped he did. He felt elaborately through his pockets.

"I don't seem to have my wallet," he said finally. "I must have lost——"

The man's straight, slow stare stopped him.

"You'd better have ownership card, driving-license, identification, and everything else," he said softly. "Because it certainly looks funny—to catch a man out in the country trying to hammer open his car trunk when it would be so easy to go to a locksmith and have it done right."

Opper swallowed and brought forth his wallet. It had to be done.

In numb despair, he saw the sheriff copy down his name and address, his license and motor numbers, and the address of the bank where he was assistant cashier. It was about the worst thing that could have happened to him. But he couldn't move to stop it. It would be infinitely worse to be hauled to a local station and have the trunk forced open. . . .

His heart seemed to stop at the thought. And at the same time he heard the whimper from the trunk sound a little louder.

"Well, is everything all right?" he said instantly to the sheriff, his voice rising high again. "I can telephone the bank to identify me if you like, and I am slightly known in the branch bank at Huntingdon, thirty miles from here, if you want to go there with me and——"

"Stop yelling!" snapped the sheriff. "I guess it's okay, Mr. Opper. You have a right to break open your own trunk if you want to. But I still think it's funny."

Opper jabbed the starter button and

raced his motor. Its high rattle drowned the whimper. He leaned more calmly over the side of the car.

"I'll want to get into the trunk tonight, anyhow. And I might as well have it opened right away. Can you tell me the name of a good locksmith in the next town?"

The man gave him some name or other. Opper smiled with set jaws, waved, and started down the highway. He moved at a decorous pace, staring straight ahead for a few hundred yards. But his eyes would wander up to the rear-view mirror.

The sheriff was standing in the middle of the road, staring after him. He stayed that way till Opper had rounded a curve and could see him no longer.

Not till then did Opper remember that he had been in such a hurry that he had left his tools by the side of the road. He cried out in a high, cracked voice, at that. Now he was unable even to try to break into the trunk. And in addition he must have raised the sheriff's curiosity to a fever pitch.

SCARCELY able to see where he was going, he drove along the highway, toward the distant swamp which was beckoning now like a dim glimpse of heaven itself.

At noon, Opper slowed at a town which was about halfway between his home and the swamp which was his goal. He turned in to another filling-station and stopped. He had to. The dash indicator showed that he had less than a gallon of gas left, and he dared not run out on the road.

His eyes were staring, glassy, set in deep hollows in his face. His cheeks were drawn and grayish. Dried sweat matted his hair and was glued to his hat-band.

He was not thinking of Lois Blye's money and beauty now. He was thinking of Martia Opper, in the trunk a few feet behind him, locked in with that mewling, half-dead animal.

All morning he had driven with the whimpers sounding in his ears. That dying sound, like the ghost of a scream for mercy, like the sound that had come from his wife's pallid lips the instant before he killed her.

He knew he could not really hear it, over the motor's noise; knew that he only heard it in reality when he was driving slowly and the engine was turning over in a noiseless purr. But tell himself that as he would, the sound beat against his eardrums constantly. The cat, in with that stark, doubled-up bundle.

But now, in spite of the dangerous, telltale whimpering, he had to drive in here and stop for more gas. However, he was crafty. He had chosen this station from among half a dozen others near-by because there was a big truck panting near the pumps while the driver tested his tires. The blast of the truck motor should drown the noise from the trunk.

A neat attendant stepped to the rear and unscrewed the gas cap almost before the car had stopped moving. Opper got hastily from behind the wheel and hurried back.

"Full?" asked the man.

"Yes, fill it," said Opper, thanking heaven for the dull thunder of the truck motor.

He watched the man put the hose nozzle in the intake. This time the hose was not draped over the trunk. Opper had turned as he drove in so that the other side of the car faced the pumps. The attendant started the gas to swishing down the hose. He stared at the dents and scratches on the trunk.

"Somebody try to break into your

trunk?" he called over the din of the truck motor.

Opper only nodded, exhaustedly. He could scarcely think, scarcely hear.

"Got to watch out for that kind of thing," the man offered amiably. "Minute you park your car somewhere some thief tries to break in."

Opper shuddered perceptibly. He thought of a thief breaking in, furtively sliding his hand along the trunk while he stared around to see that he was not watched. . . .

The attendant was staring at him. Opper pulled himself together.

"That fills it," he said. "Quart of oil. And I want some tire-tape too, if you carry it."

"Sure. How much do you want?"

"A lot. Two or three large-sized rolls——"

Suddenly Opper's voice was ringing in comparative silence. The truck motor had been abruptly shut off. Opper stared wildly at the truck. And at the same time, in the quiet, he heard the faint whimper sound from the depths of the trunk.

At once he raised his own voice almost to a shriek.

"I'm in a hurry—I'll take the hose out and screw on the cap—you get the tire-tape, three rolls—forget about the oil, I don't think I need it—hurry up—hurry——"

The bewildered attendant let himself be pushed away from the tank. Sweating and shivering, Opper drew out the hose, and screwed the cap back on. The mewling sounded constantly from the trunk. On and on. The driver of the truck near-by was staring first at the trunk and then at him.

The attendant came out of the building with three big rolls of black pitch tape in his hands. Opper fairly jumped to the steering-wheel, started the motor and raced it. The whimpering sound was overwhelmed.

"Here's the tape," said the attendant. "What you want with so much?"

"How much is it?" babbled Opper, unhearing. "Never mind. Here's five —that'll cover it. Keep the rest."

He drove rapidly out of the station. Behind him the driver of the truck looked at the station attendant.

"The guy's crazy," said the driver.

"Drunk, maybe," the attendant supplied. "Funny way he had of looking at that trunk. Oh, well!" He shrugged and went on about his work.

TEN MILES away, Opper stopped once more at the side of the road. He got out, with the rolls of tire-tape in his shaking hands.

He had had an idea just before noon that he cursed himself for not having had before.

The cat, locked in the trunk, could live indefinitely on the air that trickled in the cracks. But if the trunk were patched at every slight crevice, the beast would stop that hideous mewling in short order. Then, without that sound coming forth to betray him, he could go anywhere he liked for as long as he pleased.

With unsteady fingers he peeled the foil off the first roll of tape. He pressed strip after strip over the jagged small hole made by the jack in the trunk lid. Then he went over the rest of the trunk.

The tape did not adhere very well to the metal at first. Shivering and cursing, mumbling incoherently, with his eyes glaring out of the hollows in his face like the eyes of a man staring up from the bottom of a well, he pressed the tape so that it would stick.

He sealed up every crack of the

trunk, using all three rolls of the tape. He even got down on the road, heedless of clothes and scratches, and sealed each little crease in the bottom of the trunk that might let in air.

The whimpering went on and on while he worked. And words came, cracked and crazy, from his twisted mouth.

"Damn you! There. And there. Now whine! Go on, it won't be for much longer. Whine, damn you—damn you."

The whimpering got fainter and fainter. But that was because the tape was sealing in sound as well as air, not because the cat was already suffocating. However, the thing couldn't live much longer now.

"Should have thought of it first thing," Opper's cracked voice sounded. "Then—wouldn't have had to worry so—now it'll go down into the swamp muck with Martia—down and down—for ever."

Wearily, he climbed back into the car.

4

"ONE O'CLOCK. Be at the swamp before many more hours. The swamp."

He drove along the highway, a big man with a drawn, white face in which eyes like dull glass were sunk in deep hollows. He was no more like the George Opper who had met his wife with a silenced gun nine hours before than—than Martia Opper was like Lois Blye.

"Lois," mumbled Opper. "Lois!"

He realized suddenly that the car was weaving back and forth across the road under his unsteady hands.

"Can't do that. Suspicious. Mustn't act suspicious."

He stopped mumbling, and listened intently, driving slowly so that the motor noise was at a minimum. Had that been a whimper he'd heard? A faint whimper sounding from the trunk?

It was. It came to him faintly but distinctly, like the ghost of a scream for mercy.

"Oh, God!"

That thing, clawing back and forth in there——

Why hadn't he had sense enough to shut the trunk on its grim contents before going back to drive the cat from the house? He should have realized it might jump to the trunk; it had certainly stuck by its dead mistress closely enough before that. Why hadn't he used his head? . . .

But the whimpering died down as miles and minutes slowly passed. Died down—and at last sounded no more. Opper laughed maniacally as he stopped the car, got up, put his ear to the trunk and heard nothing. It was dead at last. Dead. . . .

Almost like a dead thing himself, he got once more behind the wheel. The swamp. He only lived to reach that, now. To reach it—if he were not stopped at last with its green, tropical foliage almost in sight. . . .

It was at three o'clock that he began to hear the roar of a motor behind him, one that spelled a clear message—the fast-turning roar of a motorcycle engine. He glared into the rear-vision mirror.

Down the road behind him came a State trooper. Opper could not help but see that his eyes were glued on the back of the sedan. On the trunk.

And suddenly, like a rift of clear blue sky in black and pressing cloud, Opper caught in his chaotic mind a sharp comprehension of all the suspicious things he had done since discovering that he

had locked that hellish beast in with the grisly bundle.

The first gas station—yelling to cover the sound of mewling from the trunk.

Trying to break open the trunk and being caught at it by the sheriff—and fleeing so hastily that he'd forgotten his tools.

The crazily abrupt leave-taking from the second filling-station, after shouting to drown the whimpering of the trapped cat. Suspicious, insane actions. . . .

The sheriff must have phoned ahead on the road to have him stopped. Or else the last filling-station attendant had done it. . . .

To have him stopped . . . to have the trunk forced open. . . .

Opper shouted aloud and reeled in his seat as he shoved the accelerator down. The car leaped as his foot went to the floorboard. The speedometer needle climbed up from the forty-mile mark.

Caught—with that thing in the trunk behind him! Caught!

"But I won't be," he yelled, staring at the suddenly startled face of the driver of a car flashing past him from the opposite direction. "I won't be!"

The speedometer needle shook at seventy miles an hour, pressed on past to seventy-six. The car screamed around a long bend in the road, swayed sickeningly as it righted itself.

But behind, the motorcycle engine, under full throttle now, beat ever louder in his ears.

"I won't be caught!"

Ahead was another bend, not so gradual as the one he had just passed. He shot toward it, forcing the big old sedan at its fullest speed, glaring straight ahead, hands clamped to the bucking wheel.

The motorcycle drew alongside. The uniformed figure on it, regardless of speed and the curve ahead, recklessly drew over within a foot of the running-board.

"Stop that car!"

Opper's reply was to try senselessly to push the accelerator harder against the floor. The trooper drew still closer, leveled his gun at Opper's body.

"Stop!"

A last remnant of sanity drifted through Opper's brain.

After all, nobody knew what was in the trunk. The trooper couldn't open it without a key, unless he broke it open. And he'd have to have a warrant to do that. Meanwhile, the cat was dead, smothered long ago, so that its ghostly mewling could not be heard. Even now he might brazen the thing out, pay a fine and go on to the swamp.

WITH his front wheels almost on the curve, Opper took his foot off the accelerator. There was a shrieking of tires as the motor braked the wheels and the car took the turn. The trooper hung grimly to the sedan's flank.

In a vast silence, shaking and sick, Opper stopped the car. The trooper, gun still in hand, stood beside him after racking his motorcycle.

"Get out," he said, waving the gun.

Opper got slowly from the car and stood before the man. He felt deft fingers search him for a weapon, and thanked God he had put the silenced gun in the trunk.

"You heard me yell to stop, and you saw me beside you. Why didn't you stop?"

In the silence succeeding the rush of air and howl of racing motors, Opper heard his voice, muffled, as though it came to his ears through a thin partition.

"I'm in a terrible hurry. Wife sick. I knew you'd haul me in for speeding, delay me, if you caught me. So I took a chance on getting away. I'm due at the hospital, where my wife is, right now."

The man smiled bleakly.

"Wife sick. Afraid you'd get hauled in for speeding. So you try to crawl away from a machine that will do a hundred miles an hour. Sure."

He looked into the sedan warily, saw that it was empty. He walked to the rear of the car and stared speculatively at the metal trunk.

The trunk presented a strange appearance — dented, battered, with thickly pressed strips of tape crossing and crisscrossing the top and sealing the cracks.

The man just looked at it in the enormous silence—looked till Opper felt the taste of blood in his mouth with the hammering of his heart.

"Only afraid of being pinched for speeding," drawled the trooper. "Sure. What's in that trunk?"

"Nothing," said Opper, the roof of his mouth so dry that he hardly knew how he managed to get the words out. "Not a thing."

"Nothing at all, eh?"

"Well, there are two empty suitcases in there. You know how these trunks are—two special cases fit in them——"

"Why is it all stuck up with tape?"

Opper leaned against the fender. He couldn't stand unbraced.

"It was leaking when it rained, so I thought——"

His voice died away. By an effort that drained all the remnants of strength he had left, he kept from screaming.

The whimper had sounded again.

Like a man hypnotized, he stared at the trunk. Tape sealed every slightest crack in it. Not one airhole, it would seem, remained for air to filter in to the cat.

But somehow it had stayed alive.

The State trooper was staring intently at the trunk. He turned slowly to Opper.

"I think we'd better open that and have a look," he said.

Opper's head shook back and forth like the head of a mechanical doll.

"No! There's nothing in it. I . . . no!"

"Come on. Where's the key?"

"I haven't the key. You can search me if you like."

"You haven't a key for the trunk. There's nothing in it. Yet you have it all sealed up as if it was full of rubies. Come on, come on, hand over the key."

"I swear——" Opper began. He stopped. The mewling whimper was a little louder.

"You have no right to stop me like this. I'm a respectable citizen and I can prove it. Take me in for speeding if you want to, but that's all you have a right to do——"

That hideous whimpering! It seemed to be rising as his voice rose, so that no matter how loudly he talked the whimper sounded through. How had that thing stayed alive? Some obscure slit for ventilation left unnoticed by him in the bottom of the trunk?

He talked on, ever more loudly, screaming against the rising sound of the whimpering.

"——absolutely nothing in the trunk —I'd prove it to you, only I haven't the key—search me if you want to—was going to a locksmith in the next town——"

His voice died, like a phonograph running down, at the look in the trooper's eyes. And in the silence the whimpering sounded so plainly from the

depths of the trunk that Opper knew that at last it must have been heard by another's ears.

"Well, why don't you go on?" said the man. "Go on yelling, and see how much good it does you."

Opper stood there, mouth open slackly, eyes glazing at the sound of the whimper from the trunk. He spoke without knowing he had spoken. It was a weary, numb surrender.

"All right," he said. "All right."

He backed away from the trunk, hands to his lips, staring at it with eyes that could not have been more horrible had they seen Martia Opper's bent form rising from it.

The last of his will snapped.

He began to scream and laugh, staring with a blank face first at the trunk and then at the State trooper. Words dripped from his writhing lips. And after the first few of them, the trooper, his own face whitening a little, manacled Opper's hands and led him like a blind man to his own car, which he drove, leaving his motorcycle beside the road, to the nearest State patrol station. . . .

THE sergeant at the station carefully folded a closely written two-page document and put it in his safe. It was the full confession of George Opper, signed by him and duly witnessed.

The motorcycle policeman strode in from the station yard. He had a sledgehammer and a cold chisel in his hands. The edge of the chisel was a little reddened.

"I sure stepped into something," he grunted, "when I stopped that guy for speeding. I told you I was just cruising along behind this sedan when for no reason that I could see it started going like a bat out of hell. Naturally I took out after it and stopped it. Then I got curious about the trunk—all dented in and taped up that way. I fried him a little and he broke and squealed."

"And what squealing!" said the sergeant. "The dirty louse! And if he'd ever reached the swamp he talks about, he might have gotten away with it."

The trooper drew out a cigarette and reached, with fingers that were not quite steady, for a match.

"Damn funny freak of luck that tripped him up," the sergeant went on. "If he hadn't locked that cat in the trunk in the dark——"

The trooper looked up from his match and cigarette.

"Cat?" he said.

"Yeah," said the sergeant. "It's all in the confession he signed while you were out breaking into the trunk. How he locked his wife's cat in the trunk with—with her—and how the cat's whining and whimpering gave him away."

The trooper finished lighting his cigarette.

"He's even crazier than I thought," he said. "There wasn't any cat in the trunk."

"If you truly would make amends, you must sign documents to show you do it of your own free will."

Lynne Foster is Dead!

By SEABURY QUINN

The strangest adventure that ever befell a mortal man happened to the handsome young American after that ill-starred traffic accident in the streets of Cairo

How sharp the point of this remembrance is!
—Shakespeare.

ABERNATHY gazed about him with a feeling of resentment, almost of disgust. Tonight the new Egyptian wing of the museum had been opened with appropriate ceremonies, and a mob of "select guests"—selected with a view to future contributions—had listened for an hour to fulsome speeches of acknowledgment. Now they were loosed among the dis-

plays, and it seemed to him that there was something vaguely shameless in the whole procedure. Merchants, lawyers, bankers, men whose sole criterion of value was the price-tag, gazed stolidly at things upon which none could set a price. Behind the plate-glass panels of the cases were bits of art-work wrought in gold and bronze and silver, lapis-lazuli, celadon, papyri setting forth in picture-writing secrets never dreamt by modern man, dessicated bodies of kings and priests and princesses whose intrigues had shaped nations' destinies in the days when history was an infant in its swaddling clothes—and these money-changers from Mammonish Temples looked at them with eyes devoid of interest as those a wandering cow might turn upon the Taj Mahal bathed in a spilth of moonlight. But if the bored indifference of the men was irritating, the "ohs" and "ahs" of their women drove him to a state of madness verging onto homicidal frenzy.

"For God's sake," he entreated Doctor Conover, "let's get out of here. I want a drink and shower. I feel as if I'd seen a gang of ghouls go picnicking down in the cemetery!"

"Pretty ghastly, isn't it?" assented his companion. "But money's where the layman is, my boy, and we have to throw these parties every once in a while for Holy Contributions' sake. Shall we go get that drink?" He turned upon his heel, but Abernathy's quick grip halted him.

"Conover," he breathed, "who is she? Lord, but she's beautiful!"

She was walking slowly toward them past the rows of glassed-in mummy-cases. Not tall, but very slim she was, sheathed in a low-cut evening gown of midnight velvet which set her tapering arms and creamy shoulders off in sharp relief. Her eyes were amber and her honey-colored hair was drawn back from a widow's peak and a high, candid brow. A pale gold seemed to underline the whiteness of her skin. In contrast to her hair and eyes, her brows were vivid black, her nose was small and slightly hawk-beaked, her full and sensuous mouth was like a moist red blossom on the unrouged pallor of her narrow face. One slender-fingered hand was toying with a rope of pearls, and as she stepped there was a glint of golden links beneath the gossamer silk encasing her left ankle. Clouded but unhidden, the jewel-red lacquer on her toenails shone through filmy stocking tips exposed by toeless satin sandals. Oddly, she seemed aloof and lonely as she walked through the crowded gallery with eyes cast pensively upon the tessellated pavement. She was oblivious of the chattering men and women as if they had been shrubs and flowers in a garden where she walked alone.

Now she had come up to them, and Abernathy heard Conover's soft, attention-calling cough. She raised a startled glance, and he heard dully, as though from far away, "Madame Foulik Bey, may I present Doctor Abernathy?"

Fringed lids swept up from plumbless eyes, and he saw her pupils expand like a cat's, spreading till they seemed to stain the amber irides like drops of ink let fall in tiny pools of clear-strained honey. Her red, moist lips were parted as she drank a sudden gasp of breath, and in her throat a small pulse wavered underneath the pale-gold skin. Her left hand, slender, rose-tipped, delicate as something molded out of Saxon porcelain, fluttered upward to the soft curve where the little palpitation quivered. Soft fingers closed upon and soothed the quaking flesh as one might soothe a trembling, frightened bird. Then she mastered her emotion, and

laid her hand in his. "Doctor Abernathy!" she acknowledged softly.

Something of the woman's malaise seemed communicated to him as the softness of her fingers lay against his palm. He felt a psychic current run through him, pervading heart and brain and body with a kindling glow. Strangely, unreasonably but resistlessly, he was drawn to her, knew that here he faced a riddle, unsolvable, perhaps, but one which he must puzzle over till solution came.

"Madame Foulik is Egyptian," he heard Conover explaining; "she must feel at home in this display, although her own *Musée des Antiques*——" He waved a faintly deprecating hand. "Well, it must be pleasing to see things that take you back to home and childhood memories."

The woman looked past him, and her black-fringed, golden eyes seemed pleading, as for understanding sympathy, as they caught and held Abernathy's. "Everything about America takes me back to home and childhood, Doctor," she answered in an almost voiceless whisper; then, laying a light touch on Abernathy's arm: "My car is waiting outside. May I help you home?"

"Oh, no, thanks," Conover replied. "I'm on the committee—have to stay and mingle with the guests and all that sort o' thing, you know. Abernathy has no strings on him, though."

"Then I shall have the pleasure of your escort, Doctor?" In the European manner she laid her hand on Abernathy's cuff.

HE EYED her covertly as the big Cadillac slipped down the avenue, tires barely whispering against the asphalt. Despite the harmony produced in her by art and nature's blending—skilful make-up skilfully applied to perfect skin, a costume tuned to her complexion as the cello's strings are tuned to match the violins' tones in a great orchestra—she seemed strangely contradictory, enigmatic, and inharmonious. There was character a-plenty, and to spare, in small, firm chin; the kestrel nose might stand for cruelty or acquisitiveness, but the cleft that marked her chin and the luscious, full, red lips were soft and passionate and made for kissing, while the long, slim, lissome lines of her, the childishly small hands with tapering, fragile fingers, the tiny, narrow, high-arched feet, were almost fairy-like. Not very young, he guessed, yet certainly not old. Her chin and throat-line had a cameo-sharp clarity, her skin was rose-leaf smooth, her breasts full-blown, high-set and outward-pointing. She might have been in the late teens, the middle twenties or early thirties; he could not decide, but if she were maturely young, or if youth still persisted in maturity, one thing was certain: she drew him to her as no woman ever had. He could feel his pulses quicken and his breath come faster as she leaned toward him when the big car whisked round a curve and the subtle, spicy scent which she affected wafted to his nostrils.

Odd how perfumes resurrect dead memories, he mused. A whiff of honeysuckle blown through car windows as you drive alone at night, and the palimpsest of time is wiped clean of the overlay of years, and you're a high school junior once again, strolling through the shadowed streets with your first sweetheart . . . the scent of fresh-turned earth as you walk through the park, and once again perspective shortens, and you are on the farm in summer, with the plowshare tearing through the black, lush topsoil . . . that heady per-

fume in her hair, upon her flesh, where had he smelled it? The Street of Perfume Sellers in the *souk* at Tugurt: *"Parfum ravissant, ya Sidi? Mais oui.* Here is attar of wild roses gathered from the Prophet's gardens—on him the Salute!—essence of carnation from the always-snowy mountains, orange blossom and sweet jessamine, musk and ambergris, the veritable scent with which Queen Sheba enmeshed Solomon the Son of David, on whom be peace! Ambergris, to stir the passions as the evening wind stirs up the dust-flecks!"

He was being boorish. Common courtesy demanded that he talk to her. "Is this your first trip to America?" he asked.

For a moment she withheld her answer, and he heard her draw her breath in with a little sucking sound. Then, "Yes," she answered softly.

"You speak English perfectly, not as if you'd learned it from a textbook or from tutors——"

"I have my English from an American."

"Well"—he puzzled over the locution for an instant—"she surely did a creditable piece of teaching. Anyone would think that you'd been born here."

He could not be sure, but it seemed to him he saw the glitter of a tear on her long lashes as she answered, "It was a man who gave me English, not a woman."

A little tremor of uneasiness ran through him. There was something eery, not sinister, but vaguely strange, in the scented darkness of the speeding limousine. Obscurely, as one perceives but does not see an object from the corner of his eye when his face is turned away, he had the odd impression that the woman struggled desperately to tell him something—to make him understand by indirection something which she dared not say outright. Somewhere he had heard that spirits on another plane fight frantically to crash the barriers which separate them from our world, seeking futilely to make the flesh-bound feel their presence; finally, with the desperation of despair, attempting to transmit their messages through psychic mediums. So, it seemed to him, it was with Madame Foulik. Strangely, and a little terrifyingly, he had the impression he was riding not with a lovely living woman, but with a suffering ghost encased in lovely flesh.

He laughed to cover his embarrassment. "Of course! I'd forgotten women in the East have Western freedom nowadays."

"I began life in an orthodox harem, and was married from it to an even stricter one. Until a year ago no man except my father and my husband ever looked upon my unveiled face."

Again that psychic signal of alarm seemed beating against Abernathy's inner consciousness. Madame Foulik spoke English idiomatically and with a strong New England accent, yet she said, "I began life" rather than "was born." No lack of fluency accounted for this choice of words, he felt. The ambiguity—if ambiguity it were—was purposeful, not accidental.

Impulsively he laid his hand on hers. "You're trying to tell me something, aren't you?" he asked. "Can't you do it?"

She winced from contact, almost as if his fingers burned, then let her hand lie quietly beneath his. "I—I can't," she faltered with a dry, hard sob, "not now, Hugh; maybe, when we know each other better——" Slowly, reluctantly, it seemed, she drew her hand away, raised it to her face and pressed cold fingertips into her cheek. Her lips quivered as if she tried to smile

and mentally he praised her courage, for she was pain-racked, but ignoring it.

"Until we know each other better?" he echoed. "That won't be long, if you will let me call. May I come tomorrow?"

"If you wish," she bent her head in assent.

It was not until they'd said good night and he was half-way home that realization filtered through his thought. "Not now, Hugh," she'd denied him when he pleaded for her confidence. They had met less than an hour before, he and this woman from a Cairene harem; he was certain Conover had not used his Christian name at introduction, yet she had known it, she had called him Hugh; his name had dropped unbidden from her as she struggled to control emotion.

INTIMACY ripened quickly between Hugh Abernathy and Ismet Foulik. It began next morning when he called to take her riding. Smiling and frankly glad to see him, she looked younger and much smaller, almost child-like, in her breeches of white gabardine, white silk shirt left open at the throat and long boots of black kid which cased her high-arched, narrow feet and slender legs. In place of a belt she wore a brilliantly embroidered orange scarf twined three times round her waist; her bright fair hair was covered with a silken kerchief blocked in orchid and pistache, edged with seed pearls and twisted like a turban.

She rode with practised ease, which amazed him. How could a woman born and bred in the seclusion of the harem have learned the art of horsemanship so thoroughly in one year of emancipation?

He saw as much of her as his work at the museum would permit, and each succeeding meeting added to his fascination, and his wonder. She was in his blood like some unconquerable drug; her beauty and her perfume made his senses reel when he was with her; the vision of her cameo-clear features and her sometimes merry, sometimes pleading, often frightened eyes swam between him and his books and manuscripts or the tiny, priceless things he catalogued.

Ismet . . . Ismet. She seemed the axis upon which his life revolved. Ismet in a backless, strapless evening gown, dancing with him on the roofs or at the supper clubs; Ismet in printed crêpe with white suède gloves and a pert, small hat which might have graced a Watteau shepherdess smiling her slow smile at him across the luncheon table; Ismet on the tennis court in shorts and halter, her glowing golden skin as vital as the sun that kissed it; Ismet in a molded lastex bathing-suit, diving like an otter and swimming like a seal.

Every day her mystery increased. She would be laughing, gay almost to recklessness; then suddenly her mood would change and the laugh-lights vanish from her eyes as the pupils seemed to swell and spread with fear until they were like disks of ebony—dull, lusterless, opaque, expressionless. Sometimes as she spoke blithely she would halt abruptly and look round her with an apprehensive glance, and at such times he could see the tremor of horripilation ripple through her vibrant skin as though a sudden gelid wind blew on her.

One evening as they strolled along the boardwalk after dinner at the shore the band burst into a quick medley of school songs. The music brought him memories of a hundred football games, of nights of study, nights of dancing,

of friendships forged for lifetime service with the underlie of mutual interest for an anvil and the thousand incidents of college life for hammer-strokes. Abruptly through the welter of mixed music came the strains of Abernathy's *alma mater* song, and he squared his shoulders as involuntarily as the veteran soldier comes to attention when he hears a bugle sounding To the Colors.

It was not until the verse had been played through and the rousing, stirring chorus sounded that he realized she was singing. The words came naturally, unbidden, spontaneously as breath. In a high, thin, sweet soprano —her voice, even in speaking, was so high it would have seemed an affectation in another woman—she was humming:

"O, Amherst, brave Amherst—'twas a name
known to fame in days of yore,
"May it ever be glorious till the sun shall
climb the heav'ns no more!"

He looked at her, astounded, and she caught her lower lip between her teeth like a little girl discovered in a naughty prank. A quick flush, bright as ripened quince, stained her throat and cheeks.

"You—*you* know 'Lord Jeff'?" he stammered.

She nodded, slowly.

"How did—did the American who taught you English teach you that tune, too?"

A change came over her flushed face. As if it were a pondering thing she dropped her mask of gayety, and the effect was swift as sunset in the tropics. For no apparent reason she was trembling; so weak she leant against him for support.

"Take me home, please, Hugh! I'm tired," she whispered.

Her personality possessed as many facets as a diamond. Save for the Saracenic cartouche cut in celadon which graced the little finger of her right hand, there was nothing of the Orient about her. Her costumes were the smartest to be had from Molyneux, Mainbocher or Schiaparelli; the stark simplicity with which her hair was done spoke hours of consultation with the *coiffeurs* of the Ritz; her speech revealed the sometimes slurred, sometimes sharp-cut accent that is peculiar to the cultured native of New England. Yet at times her dress and speech and manner seemed to be a scrupulously adjusted masquerade which sometimes lifted for an instant and revealed another being. Her eyes, particularly. Once, as they rested between dances in the King Cole Room, she laid her hand across her mouth and chin while patting back the vestige of a yawn, and instantly her whole aspect changed. Above the creamy, rose-tipped fingers looked the eyes of a veiled woman of the harem, languishing, seductive, passionate—eyes such as he had seen above the *haiks* of Arab women in the *Kasbah* of Algiers or the *souk* at Tugurt.

She took frank pleasure in his company. Never did she put him off or plead business or indisposition when he asked for an appointment, and when he called she met him with a smile and ready handclasp; she always seemed regretful when they parted. But though she showed her liking for him openly she shrank from all but formal contacts. She laid her hand in his at greeting, gave it to him when they said good-by, melted pliantly into his arms when dancing, but never had she laid her hand on him in animated conversation. When once or twice he impulsively took her fingers into his as they walked she had gently disengaged the grip, not re-

provingly or prudishly, but with an unobtrusive, quiet definiteness which discouraged further demonstrations of affection.

Glowing summer burned itself to embers. Chestnut venders replaced flower sellers at street corners; leaves came fluttering to the sidewalks or changed their greens for ardent reds and browns and yellows. Haze lay on the Westchester and Jersey hills and a hint of frost was in the air. They stood listening to the lisping gossip of the waves against the sand while silence lay across the purple, silver-dusted sky where a few stars were enmeshed in gauzy light like dewdrops in a web. As yet there was no moon, but a pale radiance glowed out of the horizon, and the argent of it lay upon the tangled skeins of white-capped wavelets creeping tiptoe-quiet up the beach.

> "The night is calm and cloudless,
> And still as still can be,
> And the stars come forth to listen
> To the music of the sea.
> They gather, and gather, and gather,
> Until they crowd the sky. . . . "

Softly, almost breathlessly, the words fell from her lips, and Abernathy turned on her, face blank with amazement.

Longfellow! "Ismet, for heaven's sake, tell me!" he begged. "You come from Egypt, yet you speak like an American; you know 'Lord Jeff,' you know Longfellow——" He stopped, the breath blocked in his throat as suddenly as if a hand had been laid on it. Her eyes, tear-misted, pleading, came up to his beneath their long, curved, golden lashes, her face was white as if she had been dead an hour, and her full lips, so mobile usually, hung limply parted, yearning, slack with longing almost past endurance. She swayed toward him a very little, like a young tree bent before a sudden wind.

He caught her in his arms. "Ismet!" he whispered. "Ismet darling!"

But before his lips could find hers she had bent her body backward, taut as a drawn bow, one little hand pressed desperately against his chest, the other held across her mouth to shield it from his kiss. "*Bismillah irrahman errahmin!*" she gasped chokingly. "Who can escape what is written on his forehead?"

She was crying now, almost inaudibly, with short, dry sobs as hard and quick and tortured as the breathing of a spent runner, and the fingers of the hand against his breast were clutching at the rough tweed of his jacket as though they closed in *rigor-mortis*. "No, Hugh—no!" she begged. "You mustn't kiss me, mustn't touch me!"

"But, my dear, you love me, don't you——"

"*Awah!*" The orientalism sounded strangely out of place . . . and yet . . . Then, taking sudden mastery of herself: "Yes, I love you; love you as I never thought that I could love, but"—she pushed him back until she stood free from his arms, and her tear-filled eyes besought him—"but you mustn't say that you love me until I've told you who I——" Her voice broke like a shattering glass, and another spasm of sharp sobbing shook her.

"Ismet!" he entreated. "This is what you've tried to tell me ever since we met, isn't it? Can't you—won't you—try to tell me now?"

She stepped back quickly, dodging deftly from the shelter of his outstretched arms, and it seemed to him her face had hardened till it was an ivory mask with the mouth outlined in blood. "Come to me tomorrow night," she bade, lips moving stiffly, awk-

wardly, as though she drove them to pronounce the words by a supreme effort, "and hear the story that I have to tell. If you still want me when you've heard it I will give myself to you, but"—he heard the castanet-sharp clicking of her chattering teeth as a shivering tremor shook her—"it is more likely you will loathe me, never want to touch or see or think of me again."

"Ismet——" he began again, but—

"Please, Hugh!" she begged.

Throughout the ride back from the shore she sat beside him silent, hands clasped in lap, all feeling gone from her face. Once while they waited for a traffic light to change he leant toward her and saw her eyes, fixed, fearful, set, as though they stared at something just beyond their range of vision, something dreadful, nameless, horrible.

For the first time since they'd met she did not give him her hand in farewell; instead she offered him a little smile so sad, so frightened and so pleading that his heart ached at it.

TRY as he would Hugh could not force his feet to hasten as he dismounted from the bus and turned down the side street where Ismet lived. Fear, vague and formless as the specter of a specter, haunted him; dull dread seemed treading on his heels; he felt the icy touch of Nemesis upon his inward consciousness. An undefined but sure sense of impending tragedy was on him. Ismet loved him, she had told him so; yet not only had she refused to marry him, she had forbidden him to touch her till . . . what could it be, this thing that she had tried to tell him since the night they met? Something dreadful. . . . "You may loathe me when you've heard," she'd said. He searched his memory for some clue, but found no hint to help him. She had been introduced to him as Madame Foulik. Perhaps she was still married, not widowed or divorced. He smiled a trifle grimly. If that were all! Did she think he'd let some miserable, misguided follower of the False Prophet stand between them? Perhaps she'd fled the harem with a lover; he'd heard of such things. . . . The thought chilled him an instant, but he brushed it by. He had been with her all summer, he knew her as he'd never known another woman; he'd stake his life on her innate purity. "And even if she has been indiscreet, I love her as she is, not as she was," he told himself aloud.

Across the west the last faint rays of sunset soaked and spread through a streak of gray cloud like blood that stains a sodden bandage. Lights flashed through the purplish fog of autumn twilight and the dry leaves of the street-side trees beat on each other with a crackling rustle like the folding of a newspaper. From the corner came the stutter of a hurdy-gurdy rendering a song favorite:

> "Thanks for the memories
> Of candlelight and wine. . . .
>
> "We did have fun,
> And no harm done. . . ."

It was not the chill of autumn evening that made Abernathy shiver. "No harm done?" If what she had to tell him kept them from each other, left him only memories of their five months together, he knew that even if he moved and talked and carried out the business of life he'd be a *zombie*—a body moving without heart or soul or hope or will to live.

His breath came faster as he neared her door, and he felt a wave of panic weakness spreading through him, swelling from his heart until it reached his

hands and feet and throat—an unfamiliar, long-forgotten feeling he had not experienced since years before when as a lad in first long trousers he had paused irresolute upon the steps that led up to his sweetheart's house.

The curtains had been tightly drawn across her windows, but here and there a little ray of light seeped out, and through the draperies came the soft, light tones of a piano. She was singing the *Chanson Solvejg* from *Peer Gynt,* and her clear, high voice went rippling through the long-sustained cadenza. Somehow the flute-like, faintly grieving notes made him think of someone walking barefoot and erect and esthetic beneath a flooding radiance of moonlight.

Candlelight and firelight mingled in the drawing-room and shone on loved, familiar objects—Chinese and Copenhagen porcelains, mahogany and brocade, ash-trays of cloisonné, sandalwood-and-silver cigarette containers, Persian rugs, the baby grand piano enameled *à la Greuze.* Like moon-radiance the blended light shone on the woman who rose from the instrument as he paused at the threshold.

He halted in midstride as if he had mistaken solid wall for doorway, and he could feel the pupils of his eyes expand as he looked at her. Nothing but her name had ever hinted Ismet's Eastern origin; her clothes, her speech, her manner were as Western as the Boulevard des Italiens, New Bond Street or Park Avenue. The woman who stood facing him was an Oriental of the Orientals, completely Eastern as an odalisque who never in her life had stepped unveiled outside the confines of the *haremlik.* More, she would have been a challenge to St. Anthony.

Beneath a Nile-green overdress of filmy, shimmering sheerness she wore a *kaftan* of pale golden tissue which clung sheath-like to her slim figure; pear-shaped emeralds trembled in her ears; above the little feet in bright red slippers stitched in seed pearls which peeped beneath the amorous golden folds he saw the gleam of heavy golden anklets. Circling her head was a gold chain composed of alternating small and large links like a slave bracelet, and from it six pendants hung down her forehead nearly to her brows — turquoise, garnet, opal, beryl, topaz, aquamarine—pear-formed and glittering they caught and held, then threw back, gleams of candlelight and fire-glow; a diamond solitaire at least three carats heavy gleamed in the nose-stud fixed in her left nostril. The heavy fragrance of ambergris, like a breath from the seraglio, hung about her like a cloud.

"Es-salaam, ya Sidi!" She gave the greeting gravely, her eyes downcast, and he noted that her lids were stained a grapeskin purple and had the luster of old silk.

His pulses jumped like startled rabbits; a wave of weakness, almost sickness, ran through him. Why this masquerade . . . yet was it masquerade? Was not this the real Ismet, and the other whom he knew and loved a passing interlude, a summer whim which had been put away with autumn's coming?

He laid his hand upon the doorpost. His scientifically trained mind, usually so orderly, was scrambled as a trash-drawer, there was a tightness in his throat, his head felt larger than his scalp. By her pose and manner, no less than by her clothes and jewelry, she had put a gulf between them wider than the distance from New York to Cairo. "Ismet," he muttered, and his

voice came thickly, almost croaking. "Ismet!"

She stood quite still. Only her left hand moved slightly, and with a start he saw her palms and nails were stained a brilliant red with henna, and each finger dyed up to the second joint with the red juice.

He could see the small pulse throbbing in her throat, knew that she was fighting for self-mastery. At length: "Won't you take your usual seat?" she begged, motioning with her painted hand to the big wing chair he was wont to sit in when they talked.

Stepping slowly, like a man who wades knee-deep in water, he found the chair and stood irresolutely, waiting her next move.

Again she motioned him to sit and moved toward him with an effortless, gliding walk, turning her flat hips but slightly, and at each step he heard the soft *clink-clong* of golden anklets. Across the fire from him she halted and slipped off her heelless scarlet shoes, then dropped cross-legged to the hearth rug. As she turned her feet palm-upward he could see that they were painted like her hands with henna juice, heels, toes and soles stained brilliant red.

Her face was bloodless, almost livid underneath its overlay of make-up, and her hands were clasped together in a gesture seeming to entreat his mercy. For a long breathing-space she sat and stared at him, her large eyes seeming to probe deep into his very soul. Mysteriously beautiful with that thin white face and darkened eyes and scarlet lips she was, and when she smiled a little it increased the mystery of her countenance. A passage from Petrarch flashed through his mind:

> "I am whatever was or is or will be,
> And my veil no mortal ever took up. . . ."

Her clear, high voice recalled him. "*Si* Abernathy, you see me as I have been for the last five years." Then, as he made no comment: "For five years, till a little while before I met you, I had been like this."

More from instinct than from reason —he had no faintest notion why he said it —he replied: "And before that, what were you?"

She threw the answer at him like a missile:

"Lynne Foster!"

"Lynne Foster?" he repeated, not so much in question as bewilderment.

"Yes, Hugh, I was—perhaps I am —Lynne Foster."

SOMETHING evil, slimy-footed as a monstrous snail, seemed to creep into the quiet firelit room, filling it with ghastly chill, dank, cold and leering. There was no seeing it, but—there it was. He had the answer, now, and as he grasped it the abysmal iciness of realization seemed to spread paralysis through every nerve and fiber of his body. This was it, then: She was mad. The summer was a lucid interval, but with the prescience the insane sometimes have, she had realized obsession might lay hold on her at any moment. Here it was. He felt his fingers tighten on the chair-arms, in his chest beside his heart there was a frantic, suffocated feeling, he was breathless, choking, smothering. . . .

"You knew him, didn't you?" Her question called him back across the borderline of consciousness.

He had to humor her. You could not reason with a lunatic. "Yes, we grew up together, went to school together——"

"And went swimming in Paint Creek on Old Man Mosher's place, and once old Anton Schilling caught us in his

melon patch. You got away, but I was collared and had to work for him two days a week the rest of the vacation to keep him from denouncing me to Aunt Malvina."

Amazement conquered Abernathy's fear. Never, so far as he remembered, had he or Foster told of that unfortunate experiment in petty larceny; yet this Cairene woman mentioned it as casually as if it happened yesterday and she had been a party to it. "Do you recall the names of any of our—my classmates?" he stammered.

"Yes, there was Charley Ellis—Froggy, everybody called him. He went to Harvard Law School and was making a big name in practise out in South Dakota when I last heard of him. Then there was Dickie Walker who sang bass in the Glee Club—one night he let out the air from Prexy's tires and was caught at it—and Stinky Davis who won seven dollars from Jack Oberman by eating nineteen hot dogs at a sitting. Jack had promised him a dollar bonus for every one he ate above a dozen, you remember? They had old Stinky in infirmary for a week. . . ."

The chill had gone from Abernathy's back and stomach, but little freezing ripples chased each other up his neck and through his scalp. Ismet, his beloved, bore a tantalizingly faint likeness to his boyhood chum and college roommate.

Where Lynne's hair had been sandy hers was palest gold, her eyes were amber while his had been light hazel, her mouth was soft and slightly bulbous-lipped and passionate, where his had been firm-set and rather humorous; but there was resemblance. Not close enough for her to be his sister, but possibly a cousin. Could it be that——

"Tell me all you know about Lynne Foster, especially what you know about him now," he heard her saying.

"I don't know anything about him now. You seem to know as much, and more, than I. We went to grammar school and high school, called on the same girls——"

"Sue Carberry and Elsie Bradshaw," Ismet interrupted. "Sue married Willie Bates and went to live in Indianapolis; Elsie took graduate work at Hopkins and married an instructor there—Phelps, I think his name was. Go on, please."

"We matriculated the same year at Amherst and took our P.G. work at Harvard. I came to the museum as assistant Egyptologist, he went out to dig near"—deliberately, he falsified the name—"near Dashur——"

"Saqqara," she corrected quickly, and he flinched inwardly as he realized how accurate her information was. Then:

"The last time Lynne was heard of was when he went in to Cairo on a two-days' leave. Police reported that a white man was involved in some affray down in the native quarter, and the car he drove was later found; but no one, neither the police, the sirdar's office nor our consul, ever found a trace of him. Most likely he was robbed and killed, then thrown into the Nile, where crocodiles disposed of any evidence of the murder. Can you supply the ending of the story?"

"Here is the ending!" She knotted her small, painted hands to fists and struck herself upon the breast. Her head was thrown back and her eyes were flushed with tears. "I am, or was—I don't know which—Lynne Foster

"You must believe me, Hugh!" She leaned toward him and turned her eyes up pleadingly. "You must believe me, Hugh, you must, you must; you *must!*

Only if you believe my story—every word of it—and still love me the way a man should love his woman can I come to you, my——" She broke the title of endearment off half uttered and rocked back on the rug. Her shoulders bent as though the weight upon them was too heavy for their lovely frailty, and as she spoke there was an eery undercurrent to the tone that sent a shiver tingling up his spine. More like a person in hypnosis who relates impressions to an audience than a waking speaker she impressed him, for her words were unaccented and mechanical, as though an unseen hand were playing on a gramophone whose sounds were relayed through her lips.

We'd been probing all the land around Saqqara for three months (she began), for Prendergrast who had charge of the expedition had a theory that a Middle Empire tomb was hidden somewhere there, and had visions of a find to make Lord Carnarvon's discoveries in the Valley of the Kings look like the sweepings from a kitchen midden. Marenteh never drove the Israelites as Prendergrast drove us, for our funds were running low and he had to show some definite signs of progress if we were to get a fresh appropriation. Everybody in the camp, Arabs, *fellaheen* and white men, were fed up with the ceaseless grind, and when I got my week-end leave I almost stepped upon myself, I was in such a hurry to dash down to Cairo. Loughbury lent me his old Sunbeam, a rattletrap of missing parts and rusty iron with brake bands almost worn away and an engine suffering from incurable asthma, but faster than a camel and fairly easy on the driver, if his nerves were steady.

The winter season was in full flood, but I found a room at Shepherd's and luxuriated in a real bed, a tub-bath and fresh linens. All Saturday I did the rounds, the service clubs, the hotel bars, and the nine-hole golf course. I slept late Sunday morning, then went out to fill up all the gaps I could, for heaven only knew how soon I'd get another leave. I think I'd taken several whiskey-sodas too much when I realized how late it was and hustled into riding-khakis, cranked the engine of my bag o' junk and set out for Saqqara in a rush. Traffic was so heavy on the boulevards that I was almost frantic, for every time I stopped my engine died, and as my starter wasn't in commission I had to get out and hand-crank it, risking a smashed wrist from backfire. Finally I swung into the native quarter, where, though the streets were narrower, the traffic was much lighter and everybody moved aside each time I blew my horn.

I was tearing through an empty alley, doing forty-five, or maybe fifty, when right before me drove an old-time hack—one of those one-horse black boxes like they used to use at funerals in America before the war. An Arab driver sat upon the box, and with him was the biggest, blackest, fattest Negro I had ever seen. I recognized him as a *kapusi aghasi,* or guardian eunuch, and by that token knew the coach contained a woman from some wealthy Cairene's harem. "Look out!" I shouted as I blew my horn. "Pull over to the left—the left, you fool!" But the coachman jerked his reins and drew his carriage to the right, turning it broadside to me. I cut my engine off and jammed my brakes down hard, but the worn-out bands refused to hold, and with a crash of smashing glass and splintering wood I cannoned full-tilt into the old carriage.

I was stunned and shaken, but not hurt by the impact, and had small difficulty in climbing from the wreckage. The broken cab was lying on its side, its frosted windows shattered and its door staved in. Horse and coachman were nowhere in sight, but inside the carriage I caught a glimpse of huddled black silk, the woman's *faradje* or overmantle, and a little flash of white which was her face-veil. As I leant across the opening of the broken window to assist her the black eunuch rushed at me with a drawn saber. *"Allah ijjiblah rehba rama!"* he shrieked at me in a high, sexless falsetto—"may Allah send an earthquake to destroy thee!"

He was so fat he waddled like a duck and shook like a great bag of mush each step he took, but if he was ridiculous, and his high, thin, piping voice was comic, there was nothing droll about the scimitar he swung at me. I'd seen those things in action at our diggings. Razor-sharp and freshly honed each morning, they sheared through almost anything they struck. They could cut a three-inch hempen hawser as easily as if it had been twisted putty, and I knew if he got in one stroke at me I'd turn up with a missing hand, perhaps a missing head.

I dodged his blow and reached down for my crank-handle, which providentially was in the emergency. Then we went at it hammer and tongs, he intent on killing me, my only thought to tire him out. Finally he drew his saber back as if it were an ax, and I knew I'd have small chance of dodging it; so I swung the iron handle to his stomach, hitting him with every ounce of strength I had. He went down as if he'd been a blown-up bladder which I'd punctured, hugging himself with agony, his face thrown back, mouth squared, eyes goggling horribly, and I turned to run, but found my every exit blocked.

The street which had been quiet and deserted as a country churchyard at midnight was boiling full of mad humanity, Arabs, Negroes, Copts and Jews, and some who blended all four races in their blood. They pressed on me from every side and I realized I was in deadly peril. "Swine, dog, *feringhi!*" I heard them screaming. "Drunkard, killer, *oudj al-ghass*—countenance of misfortune!" Here and there a knife showed, and some of them had picked up stones, but I might have fought my way through them with the crank-handle, though I should have been pretty well hacked up. Just then, however, I saw the top of a *tarboosh* come bobbing through the mob, and caught the hail: "Make way, O Moslems, give way, thou sons of noseless mothers, naughty sisters' brothers!"

The insults might seem comical to Western ears, but the insulter was no laughing matter. He was a "Gyppie," a Cairene policeman recruited from the giant Sudanese, and to fight him off would be impossible as wrestling with a wild bull-elephant. Also, he represented law and order, and would undoubtedly arrest me. I had no way of knowing how much I had hurt the woman in the carriage, but I realized she belonged to an important household, and the scandal they would raise would be terrific. I was not drunk—not very drunk, at any rate—but the fact I had been drinking when I drove a car would weigh against me at the hearing. I looked around me panic-stricken, and the voice that whispered in my ear seemed like that of a messenger from heaven: "This way, *effendi*, ere the policeman arrives. I will hide you so no one can smell you out, though he call upon the seven mystic names of Allah in his search!" He seized me by the

wrist and dragged me through the doorway leading to a flat-faced house.

It was dark as moonless midnight in the place, but my guide knew the way. We could hear the shouting and the tumult in the street outside, but it faded every second as he led me down a zigzag passage choked with utter blackness, through a door that creaked and whined on rusty hinges, and out into a narrow lane between high walls that reeked with dreadful smells and was paved with better left unguessed-at debris. We stumbled through the muck a dozen feet or so, then brought up at a dead-end.

"What's this?" I cried. "There's no way out! We're trapped——"

For the first time I had a good look at my conductor. He was a giant Negro, and no eunuch. A brown burnoose of camel's hair was wrapped about him, and from its updrawn hood his broad face with its startlingly white teeth and liver-colored lips grinned at me like a fiend fresh out of Erebus. In one wide short-fingered hand he held a square-cut length of rhinoceros hide, and I saw the blow descending even as I saw the weapon. "This is the ending of thy pathway, O eater-up of helpless maidens, O murderer, O infidel!" It seemed to me I heard the slapping impact of the rawhide on my temple, but I can't be sure, for when it struck I ceased remembering anything.

I WOKE up in a big room, windowless and vaulted like a tomb. Two brass lamps lighted it, and from a pair of censers incense spiraled lazily. I was lying on a cotton mattress upon the floor beside the wall; by the other wall upon a similar pallet lay the body of a young girl wrapped in a white winding-sheet. She had been a pretty thing, with curling russet hair, white, creamy skin and small, cleanly cut features. Across her temple was a gash which might have been a sword cut, or a cut from splintered glass, and another half-closed wound showed in her throat. Facing me, between the body and the mattress where I lay, an old man squatted cross-legged.

He was dressed in a white cotton *djebba,* and on his head he wore a turban wound with green which marked him as a pilgrim to the holy places and Mecca. His face was pale, lined, ascetic; the beard that hung down to his waist was almost white as his bleached robe and seemed to have a silky, almost iridescent texture. As I whimpered with the pain of waking he looked at me. He did not turn his head, but just moved his eyes, and I quailed before his glance as from a physical attack.

Yet there seemed no anger in his look; rather it was reproachful, infinitely sad and, it seemed to me, a little puzzled. They were strange, violet-blue eyes he had, and I wondered at their lightness until I recalled many Egyptians have Turkish blood, and Turks are often blonds. "Behold thy handiwork, O *guelbi,*" he commanded, gesturing toward the body with a motion of his eyes. "She was my sole remaining child, my soul, my heart, my eyes, and thou hast brought her to the grave. Is it not enough for thee to drive thy devil-wagons through the streets where women walk unveiled and men are drunk on the forbidden wine? Must thou also come into our quarter, scattering death and misfortune?"

I got up on my elbow rather weakly, for the knockout blow had left me faint and dizzy. "I'm terribly sorry," I apologized, "but it was not all my fault. Your coachman turned the carriage right before my car, and it was impossible to stop. . . ."

His old hypnotic eyes were on me with a fixed, unwinking stare, and I faltered in my excuse, but I had to go on talking. This was a gentleman of the old school I was dealing with, fanatically Mohammedan and believing without question in the justice of the doctrine which calls for blood to wash out blood. The lack of anger in his manner didn't fool me. My carelessness had killed his only child; he was duty-bound to get redress, and the duty which he owed the code by which he lived was narrow as the grave, and as inexorable.

"She was my sole remaining child," he answered passionlessly. "My sons are wed, my wives are dead, and if they were not—I am old and full of years; can a man of three score and a score beget fresh children? Can a blind man pleasure in the sunset or the naked tear his clothes?"

He fell silent for a little, ruminating on the cud of bitterness, and my apprehension grew.

"I'm willing to make any reparation that I can," I offered. "I'm not a rich man, but such property as I have is yours——"

"Wah! What would I do with thy property, *ya guelbi?* What would a dog do with more fleas? What need has the desert of more sand? Thou hast made my face black as an oath-breaker, O murderer of maidens!"

"How is that? What oath——"

"The small piece of my soul that men called Ismet was affianced to my friend and boyhood comrade, Foulik Bey. He is of my age, and four times has he had the four wives which the Prophet—on him the Salute—permits. I have put him off from year to year—aye, and from one month to another—now he is determined that I keep the pact, for a dead man takes no wives, and the time approaches when he joins the blessed ones in Paradise. The deeds are signed and witnessed, the amount of dowry fixed; thrice by the *ka-bah* have I sworn that she should wed him on the sixth day of *Zuihijjah*. *Rajab* is nearly sped and she, his promised bride, the dispenser of delights in his old age, lies lifeless by thy hand. How should I deal with thee for this, O infidel?"

It was as hot as only Egypt can be in that closed-in room, but suddenly I felt a chill. The Arabs are ingenious and the Turks are more so when it comes to the invention of slow deaths, and the old gentleman seemed to be of Turco-Arab ancestry. Unless I thought fast I'd be wishing I were dead ten hours before I breathed my last.

"I wish I could suggest some satisfaction," I temporized. "I'd gladly take your daughter's place if that were possible, but——"

"Ya Allah! Rabbi ma ighleg bab hataa iheul bab—God does not close one door without opening another!" he exclaimed.

"What d'ye mean?" I asked.

"If thou wouldst truly make amends thou must sign documents to show thou dost it of thy own free will, for it will not be lawful—or possible—if thou dost it otherwise."

Still in the dark, but willing to do anything to appease the sinister old man, I signed the document he drew in Arabic.

It was a handsome piece of lettering, artistic as the center of a Persian rug, and just as meaningless to me; for my Arabic was strictly limited to the modern bastard tongue while this was couched in the old classic language, and as far as I could make out it referred principally to the greatness of the house of Yousouf Pasha, the beauty of the Lella Ismet and the great

munificence of Allah the Compassionate and Merciful.

As soon as I had fixed my signature upon the scroll the old man changed completely. He was now the urbane, gracious host, solicitous for my comfort, anxious that I do his poor house the honor of accepting entertainment.

We dined together, eating *kous-kous*, flat, small bread-loaves baked with poppy seeds and anise, pastries made of sweetened dates and ground pistache beaten into soured milk, and innumerable cups of almost mud-thick coffee. All through the meal and the postprandial coffee my host talked fluently, almost garrulously, and—surprisingly, in view of his bereavement—the subject of his discourse was the education of the high-caste Moslem woman according to the orthodoxies of the faith. The reverence due to man by woman, the duty of a woman to her father and her husband, the admonition of the Prophet—on him the Peace!—against letting women learn to read, were dwelt upon at tiresome length, and before an hour had passed I felt my eyelids growing heavy, despite the coffee I had drunk. A black slave entered with profound salaams and whispered to his master, "They have come!" but I was so sleepy I could scarcely understand his words. Neither did the sudden flash in Yousouf Pasha's eyes warn me that I was in any way concerned in the message.

"If only I could rest my eyes a minute," I remember thinking, and experimentally I closed them. . . . Too drugged with sleep to offer any fight, I felt a pair of hands grasp me beneath the arms and other hands upon my ankles. Somehow, I couldn't raise my lids to see where they were carrying me, but as I swung between my bearers like a hammock I heard old Yousouf Pasha's voice raised in a pæan of triumphant praise:

"Ya Allah! Thou All-Knowing, All-Compassionate! Thou healer of the wounded heart. . . ."

THE next thing I remember I was lying in the vaulted room where I had first wakened, and the body of the dead girl had been moved so close to me that we were like two people lying in a bed. The brass lamps had been taken out and in their place a torch of fat wood blazed with a dull, smoky light. At the foot of the pallets on which the body and I lay, a tripod with a charcoal brazier stood, and before it knelt a pair of the most precious vagrants I had ever seen.

They were a man and woman dressed in positively filthy rags, mat-haired and grime-encrusted, almost incredibly wrinkled, but without a shred of the dignity old age usually imparts. As they blew upon the charcoal in the firepot they wheezed and moaned a sort of singsong chant, and when their lips snarled back I saw that they were almost toothless, but retained a tusk or two apiece, creating an effect far more repugnant than bare gums would have made.

A single word flashed through my brain: "Torturers!" Somewhere I'd heard or read that an ancient punishment for murderers was to sew them up in sacks with bodies of their victims and leave them there bound tight against the putrefying corpses. I tried to rise, to scream, to curse them, but the drug that Yousouf Pasha had administered in my coffee made me helpless as a paralytic.

Now the necromancers rose and wound long bandages of sopping cloth around their faces, covering nose and mouth, and if volition had not gone

from me I should have retched, for the cloths were wet with thick, red-brown liquid. I feared it was blood, and the torment of the sickness which I felt, but which I could not give way to, almost made me faint.

The man reached underneath his ragged, filthy burnoose and fished out a palmful of coarse powder, reddish-gray and flaked like bran, which he threw upon the orange-glowing charcoal. Instantly the room was filled with a thick, penetrating vapor, sweet as musk and acrid as peat-smoke, which eddied to the vaulted ceiling, then seemed to pour back down again, almost like a liquid.

I did my best to hold my breath, but presently I had to inhale, and the incense—if it could be called so—stung and cut my throat like acid. I was slipping off into a state of anesthesia. My eyes were watering, my nose seemed plugged with cotton, my throat was clogged with phlegm. My heart was beating wildly, and I could not breathe, yet somehow I retained consciousness.

The withered hag produced a leather sack about the size of a tobacco pouch and thrust her hands in it. They came out greasy, dripping fat. She took the man's hands between hers and rubbed them till they glistened with the rancid unguent; then round and round the room they marched with an awkward, goose-step sort of pace, clapping their hands with a sliding motion, as if they had been cymbals, and reciting some strange gibberish in a kind of syncopated singsong.

They marched so many times around me and the body that I lost count of their circlings, and it was something of a shock when they abruptly halted, the man before the dead girl, the old crone at my feet. Then with a leaping pounce they jumped and landed full astride us, the man upon the dead girl's chest, the old witch straddling mine. She ran her greasy hands across my brow in the same place that the girl was wounded, and I felt a searing pain as if she'd scored me with a red-hot iron. From the corner of my eye I saw her male companion follow suit, and as his grease-smeared fingers touched the dead girl's wound it seemed miraculously to heal, leaving smooth white skin where there had been a livid, gaping wound a moment before. In another instant she had marked my throat in the same spot where the girl was wounded; again I felt that burning torment and once more saw the girl's wound close beneath the greasy fingers of the man.

Now they both fell chanting in a slow but ever-quickening tune, and the old witch drew a needle-bladed dagger from her girdle. A sort of phosphorescence seemed to shine upon her hands where she had smeared the fat on them, and this was transferred to the knife, for I saw blue sparks fly from it like friction-stars thrown off by an emery wheel.

She began to stab me, not deeply, but with a quick, pecking motion, so her fiery dagger seemed to dart as if it were a sewing-machine needle, or the tool of a tattooist. Deliberately, as though she found the task pleasant and meant to savor every possible delight in it, she drove her dagger through my ear-lobes, pierced my left nostril, then, speeding up her strokes, traced a swirling line of arabesques across my cheeks, over my chest, up and down my arms and legs and stomach. The pain was almost past endurance, for the dagger burned as if it had been heated to a white glow, but I was powerless to move, or even flinch beneath the tor-

ment. I could not hear the words the man was singing, but the woman's voice came to me thickly through the mufflings of her imbrued bandage. With her hideous face pressed close to mine she screamed:

"As the sufferings of the damned shall never cease when Allah makes their faces black at the last day, so shalt thou remain henceforth clothed in this form we give thee till thy flesh has crumbled in the grave, *ya bent*—O daughter!"

Dimly and indistinctly, as we sometimes conjure up resemblance to a living creature in a cloud-formation, it seemed to me the greasy, writhing incense snaking lazily from the charcoal was blending in the semblance of a female form. It was vague and undefined, but I thought I could make out the length of limbs, the swell of hips and breasts, and, above, the hazy outlines of an up-stretched neck.

The burning pain from the blue-glowing dagger was almost more than I could bear, but the nearness of the hideous old witch's face, the stench of blood upon her filthy bandage and the foul odor of her dirt-encrusted hair and ragged clothes were worse. A wave of utterly soul-racking nausea welled through me, and with a gagging, choking cry I wrenched myself upon my side. The smoke that filled the room seemed to have turned from gray to black, and through it I could see the torchlight burning feebly, outlining the half-definite female fog-form like a silhouette cast on a window-blind by a weak light. Then even that was lost to view and I was shrouded in a cloud of pitch-black darkness. Perhaps I fainted then, perhaps it was a little later, but I was so weak and sick and utterly miserable that the borderline between oblivion and consciousness was lost. The last thing I remember was the unvoiced thought: "If this is death, I'm glad of it."

I WOKE to such a sense of physical well-being as I had not experienced since the crew broke training when the rowing season ended and I'd had a chance to go to bed as late as I desired with a full meal underneath my belt. They'd taken me into another room, much larger than the torture chamber, and as I looked about me lazily I catalogued its furnishings with something like the pleasure I'd have taken in an art gallery. Through marble fretwork set in windows shaped in narrow Saracenic arches, sunbeams slanted and laid arabesques of gold on umber tiles and on the silky rugs and leopard pelts which strewed the floor. Sunk in the pavement was a small pool in which I saw the gleam of swimming goldfish. There were no chairs or sofas, but there were pillows in profusion, peacock-green, maroon and lemon-yellow. Under me there was a mattress stuffed with down and covered with a silk pelisse striped violet and orange. The air was heavy with the scent of musk and ambergris, and silent with the stilled hush of a church when all the worshippers have left, except that somewhere in the house a wooden drum sobbed softly. A one-stringed guitar lay upon the floor; beneath a window stood a wood embroidery frame with a square of tapestry half finished; by the arched door, hung with violet-and-silver curtains was, incongruously, a gilded grand piano. There were no pictures, naturally, but facing me upon the farther wall was a gilt-framed mirror six feet wide and ten feet high.

I could see reflections of the curtains at the door sway lightly as a whiff of breeze came wafting up the outside cor-

ridor, and as I watched the softly undulating motion of the draperies I became aware of something else shown by the looking-glass. Stretched on a pallet laid upon the floor, and looking straight at me, was the most lovely girl I'd ever seen. But I could not see my own reflection.

"Did they really do me in last night, and have I gone to Paradise because they killed me in a Moslem house?" I wondered. "Is this one of the Prophet's fabled *houris?*" Involuntarily I put my hand up to my forehead.

The looking-glass girl did the same.

"Good Lord!" I exclaimed as I kicked the striped silk cover off. There was a chime of silver anklets, and the mirror-girl kicked off her cover, displaying one of the most charming forms I'd ever looked at. She was quite undressed; for, as I was later to discover, the habit of "sleeping raw" just now becoming popular with Western women has been in vogue in the Near East since Alexander's soldiers introduced Greek customs. I moved slowly toward the mirror and the girl walked toward me. Arm's length from the looking-glass I halted and put out my hand. The mirror-girl's slim hand came up to meet mine and touched my fingers tip to tip, but instead of warm flesh I encounterd cool, hard glass. I laid my palms against the glass; the girl behind the speculum did likewise. We might have been a pair of children playing "pease porridge hot, pease porridge cold." I even turned to look behind me. Besides me, there was no one in the room.

You remember that old song we used to sing in college:

> "How does it feel to be so beautiful,
> You great, big, beautiful doll?"

I suppose I'd sung that foolish verse ten thousand times. Now I had the answer. It felt queer—creepy.

The girl's reflection—with growing consternation I realized it was mine—was beautiful. I—or she—was much shorter than I had been, barely five feet tall, and utterly exquisite. Her—my—face was perfect oval, neither white nor tan, but warmly shaded, like Parian marble with a light reflected from a golden mirror on it. Where my hair had been a sandy blond the reflected woman's was light as clear-strained honey, and very long and fine, plaited in long braids and wound in disks almost as large as saucers, and pinned each side the head with jeweled pins. The brows, in contrast, were so black and fine they might have been laid on in India ink with a bamboo brush. In her left nostril, fastened by a little hoop of gold, there was a square-cut topaz larger than an olive-pit, and its warm, translucent brown exactly matched the puzzled, frightened eyes that looked into mine. Great hoops of gold, so large their lower margins almost touched the creamy shoulders, were hung in her small, low-set ears; half a dozen bracelets of fine silver tinkled on each wrist; about each sharply-molded ankle was a pair of massive sand-cast silver bands.

The body matched the face in beauty, slim as a youth's, with slender hips and tapering legs, a flat stomach, but very full and high and pointed breasts.

I took a step back and turned sidewise, appraising the profile reflected in the mirror. Oddly—perhaps naturally I could regard this body into which I had been forced objectively as if it were the body of another, and the more I looked at it the lovelier—and stranger—I appeared to be. Carefullly and analytically I scrutinized the face. It

resembled me. In the eyes, the nose, the small, firm chin, there was a hint of similarity, but the very points of likeness made it more unlike me. It was as if I'd been transmuted from a base to a fine metal, idealized and etherealized. The woman in the mirror was not I—oh, no!—but if I'd had a lovely sister who bore a faint family semblance to her none-too-handsome brother this might have been she. Physically, I felt no difference, save that I seemed to move more easily and lightly. Neither was there any mental difference—then.

All at once I burst out raging. "Magic or no magic, they can't do this to me!" I yelled.

Yelled? No, screamed. The voice which said the words my mind formed was high and clear and bell-like. Even in my rage I realized it was musical.

But just then I was in no mood to test the implements with which my personality had been furnished. I was outraged, fairly wild with anger. It was as if I'd wakened from a night's debauch to find that my companions had made off with my clothes and left me in some remote place with a woman's dress on me. Just as I should have sought my masculine attire in such circumstances, so I was looking for my proper body now.

I RUSHED pell-mell at the doorway, tore the curtain from my path and pattered down the corridor, the little henna-painted feet on which I ran making angry, slapping impacts on the tiles. Presently I reached a door and seized its antique silver handle in both fists. But turn and twist it as I might, I could not make it spring the lock.

The noise I made aroused the porter, and he swung the panels back, stepping through the opening and looking at me questioningly. He was big and very black and almost as naked as I was. His costume was composed of three articles: a turban, a breech-clout and a scimitar which had a blade as wide as a meat-cleaver.

"*Allah yeseemliq, ya Lella!*—God's blessing on thee, Lady!" he salaamed.

"Get out o' my way!" I returned. "D'ye think that you can get away with this——"

His amiable grin turned to a puzzled frown. From the rolls of fat that billowed down his stomach till they half obscured his girdle-top, as well as the high voice in which he spoke, I knew him for a *kapusi aghasi,* or eunuch harem-guard, and probably in all his years of service in the seraglio he had never before seen a *lella* who came pounding at the exit of the *haremlik* and motioned him to stand aside. "Make way!" I cried again, and tried to brush past him.

He turned his mountainously obese stomach broadside to me, barring the door effectually as if he'd backed a coal-truck into it.

I drew back my fist and let him have an uppercut, and for the first time realized the handicap of the body I was wearing. Something seemed wrong with my shoulder muscles, I couldn't draw my arm back properly, couldn't seem to aim the blow correctly; worse, I could put no force behind it. The little fist I swung struck harmlessly on his black chin, and a dreadful pain ran up my hand and wrist and arm where I bruised my knuckles on his jawbone.

I tried a second blow with even less success. Then he picked me up as if I were a half-grown child and bore me screaming down the corridor and back into the room I'd quit a moment earlier. There he dropped me on the rug and left me. It must have been ten minutes later that I realized I was crying like a

naughty child in a tantrum, beating both fists in a pillow, kicking till my toes were bruised against the floor, and literally streaming tears. When I looked at my reflection in the mirror I saw my eyes were red and swollen and my cheeks a mass of anger-blotches. I washed my face with water from the goldfish pool, dried it on the cover of my bed and sat down sullenly to wait developments.

I had not long to wait. The *tinkle-tonk* of anklets sounded in the hall and two young women, one part Arab, the other black as only full-blood Sudanese can be, came in and greeted me with a profound *temana,* touching the floor, the knees, the heart, the lips and forehead, as they entered. "The Salute, O daughter of the house of Yousouf!"

"Get out o' here! I'm no one's daughter, and you know it——" I began, but they paid no more attention than if I hadn't spoken. One of them slipped a pair of *takoums*—rocker-soled wooden sandals — on my feet, while the other swathed me in a *pestemal,* or silk-embroidered cotton bath-towel, till nothing but my head and feet were visible. When they'd wrapped me up till I was helpless as a mummy in its bindings they informed me that "if the honored lady is prepared, so is the bath," and ushered me down to the bathrooms.

There they took my hair down and arranged it in a coil on top of my head, binding it with a square of bright silk *à la babushka.* After that I sweltered in the hot room for an hour; then they laid me on a marble slab and sluiced me with great bucketfuls of water, first warm and soapy, finally clear and cold as ice. Then they kneaded me and rubbed me with sweet-smelling unguents, re-dyed my palms and soles and toes and fingers, gave fresh outline to my brows with a cosmetic pencil, beaded my eyelashes and rubbed my lids with ground antimony—*kohl,* they call it.

I felt exhilarated, positively radiant, as I clop-clopped in my wooden sandals back along the stone-paved corridors, and was almost satisfied with life—temporarily, at any rate—when they led me to the dressing-room.

Whatever else he was, old Yousouf Pasha was not niggardly. The dressing-room was stocked until it would have put the wardrobe mistress of a Broadway show to shame. It was a big room, and the walls were lined with six-foot chests of carven cedar, all full of feminine apparel. There were baggy pantaloons with ruffled bottoms, tight little jackets stiff with embroidery, dresses without number, scarves, shawls and veils, and in smaller cabinets of sandalwood was jewelry enough to pay a prince's ransom, anklets and bracelets, bangles and brooches, bandeaux, earrings, toe-rings, nose-rings in variety enough to make a regiment of women sparkle like the jewelry window of a ten-cent store.

When we were laboring through prescribed psychology in school I'd read in one of Weininger's monographs that women regard clothes entirely differently from men, that they receive a sort of psycho-sexual stimulus when beholding lovely clothing, whether on themselves or others, and think of clothes as part of them, rather than things to be put on and stripped off, as men do. I remember thinking that the statement was a lot of scientific bosh, but on this first day of my womanhood I knew how right the *herr professor* was. I thrilled until I felt as if I blushed all over when the slave-girls took those piles of gorgeous dresses from their chests; when they put the dress I'm wearing on me

I felt myself go weak all over, and had to press my hands together to keep them from trembling.

The idea of a nose-ring—"as if I were a bull," I'd thought when I first saw it — seemed far more tolerable when they put this diamond in my nose, and as they slipped the bracelets, amulets and anklets on me till I couldn't move without a tinkle I felt delight increasing till it was almost ecstasy. I was ready, eager, to go back with them and see myself in the long mirror, and when I looked at the reflection which smiled back at me I discovered something more. The new body which encased my personality—or soul, or spirit, call it what you will—was still a thing to be objectively considered and admired, but no longer with complete detachment. It was not I, yet it was I. I knew it was myself—it hurt me when I stumbled up against a tabouret, I could feel the pangs of thirst and hunger in it—yet it was like another person, also. I loved it as I might have loved an exquisite young girl if I'd retained my own body, and—please try to understand—at the same time I loved to be loved by me. It was a pleasure to behold myself, to preen and pose and posture at the mirror, and the sensation when I ran my hands along my arms or body was something like that which a cat must have when it's stroked until it purrs.

The slave-girls seemed to understand this perfectly, and instead of laughing in derision they gave nods and smiles of approval when, unable to resist the impulse, I crossed the room and kissed my own reflection in the looking-glass.

I KNEW that Yousouf Pasha's house was orthodox, but I had not realized how it adhered to the old order. The periods of prayer were scrupulously observed with the prescribed prostrations and ablutions; throughout the month of *Ramadan* we fasted rigorously from sunrise to sunset, not taking so much as a sip of water or whiff of smoke by way of relaxation, but at night we stuffed ourselves with food and sweetmeats, and slept as much as possible by day.

There was no nonsense about Yousouf Pasha. He was lord and master of the *selmalik* and *haremlik* and everything within their confines. When, in the evening of my first day as his daughter, I was sent for by him, I found I had to kneel and press my hands flat to the floor, then lay my brow between them while I intoned formally, "*Es-salaam, ya abu*—the Salute, O my father." Not until he had responded, "*Es-salaam, ya bent*—the Salute on thee, O daughter," might I rise, and then I had to stand with folded hands and eyes cast down demurely till he bade me sit upon a cushion at his feet.

I began to remonstrate with him, speaking as an equal to an equal, but before I'd said a dozen words he broke in with, "*Istaghfir Allah, ya bent*—ask God's pardon, daughter!" Then he explained my status to me and left nothing to imagination.

By my criminal carelessness I had robbed him of his one ewe lamb and the possibility of making good his promise to his life-long friend at a single stroke. But I had atoned by offering to take the daughter's place, and signed a statement that I did it willingly. In reliance on that statement he had trafficked with a pair of *slubbia* necromancers, desert gipsies, workers of unclean magic and followers of *Shaitan* the stoned and rejected. It had cost him much gold to secure their services, for the necromancy which enabled him to change a man into a woman or a

woman to a man was something which could be worked only once in a magician's lifetime, and was accordingly high-priced. Moreover, by dealing with these outcasts he had put his soul in jeopardy. However that might be, the work was done, I had become a woman—and one to make men's hearts a tesselated pavement for her feet, he admitted after a long, critical survey. I was to take his daughter's place and marry his old friend Foulik Bey who had, of course, never seen his bride-to-be. Meantime I must be schooled to play the part in which I had been cast; I must be letter-perfect by the marriage day, and letter-perfect I should be, if he had to kill me in the process of rehearsal. There was no better way for me to start my schooling than by assuming the rôle of a meek, submissive child, as Allah had intended womankind to be from the creation of the world.

My Arabic was limited to the *patois* of the bazar, and I had to learn the classic tongue which was the court language of the old Moslem aristocracy; so a teacher was engaged for me. He was a gentle, doddering old man, more than old enough to be my great-grandfather, but when I went to meet him I was draped from head to foot in a voluminous *faradje* with a Turkish *yashmak* covering my entire face. When the teacher left I was upbraided for immodesty. I had worn no gloves and he had seen my naked hands.

Embroidery was a required subject in the *Egyptienne's* curriculum, and I think I was more surprised than my instructresses when I found my fingers took to it naturally. It seemed to me that not the least uncanny part of the strange business was the aptitude of my new body for some things, its utter clumsiness in others. I'd always been a fair pianist, and I found that I had lost none of my skill. Indeed, I played far better, for my woman's fingers were more flexible and agile, though the smallness of my hands proved something of a handicap, since I found it very difficult to reach an octave. I learned to play the one-stringed guitar easily, for I'd played both mandolin and banjo as a lad; but when I practised shadow boxing privately I found I'd lost all skill at it. My wrists turned in, I couldn't seem to shut my fists correctly, my punches had no semblance of precision.

The niceties of daintiness which women in the West have just begun to practise have been common in the East since before the Crusades. Twice each week I spent four hours in the hot room of the bath, and this was followed by a vigorous massage and "flower bath." The slaves took down my hair, filled it with rose petals and rubbed them vigorously into my scalp. Afterward they did the same to my entire body, so that in a little while the room was filled with rose-scent, and when I dropped off to sleep following the massage I dreamt of flowers. Once each three weeks I was shaved. A eunuch barber rubbed me with a scented soapy paste all over, then ran his razor lightly over me, and the body-hair came off like cold cream wiped away with tissue, leaving me as smooth as ivory from my neck to my feet.

ZUIHIJJAH, last month of the Moslem year, arrived, and with it came my wedding day. I spent the morning at the bath, being sweated, massaged, rubbed with flowers. After that I slept for several hours, and when I woke, the women came to dress me. My face was painted like a doll's, a penciled line joined my eyebrows above my nose; jewels were hung and draped

on me wherever there was room, around my head, on arms and wrists and ankles, in my ears and nose and on every finger. Even my toes, hidden in soft slippers of white kid with silver tassels, had rings thrust on them till they seemed like little curtain-rods. My robe was heavy satin, stiff with jeweled embroidery; the veil that covered it was held in place by a gold crown. Slave-women had to steady me as I walked through the corridors, for the weight of gown and jewelry was not much less than a hundred pounds. They sat me in a chair, the first I'd seen in Yousouf Pasha's house, and crowds of women guests filed by, murmuring charms against the evil eye and examining my costume critically. Etiquette required that I set my face in an unchanging smile and hold the grimace steadily. This was not hard to do, for my cheeks and lips and chin were so stiff with enamel that I felt as if I sat for a life-mask.

How long the ordeal lasted I don't know, but I was almost fainting from fatigue when the slaves came to conduct me to the bridal chamber. One grasped me by each arm, and supported by them I walked down the room. The women dropped back as I passed and reached out to touch my gown or veil for luck. *"Mâshallah*—Allah shield thee from the envious!" came the murmured benediction as I made my slow progress to the room before whose doors two eunuchs stood with drawn sabers. The veil was drawn across my face and pinned in place, and with a giggling push the slave-girls shoved me through the door.

Inside was an old gentleman, very straight, very slender, most aristocratic. He was buttoned tightly in a double-breasted frock coat which fairly blazed with decorations. Save for his red *tarboosh* he might have been an artist's ideal of a Southern colonel, for he had the small white beard and sweeping white mustache inseparable from that stock character in pictures. As I came forward he bowed in European fashion, then took my hand and raised it to his lips. Next he put both hands up to my crown and raised it from my head, then drew the jeweled pins from my veil. I don't think I quite realized what had happened till that instant; then a flush so vivid that I felt it burn my cheeks swept through my face. This was Foulik Bey, my bridegroom, and by unveiling me he had accepted me as his. I was Ismet Foulik Hanum, wife of Foulik Bey—I who five months earlier had been Lynne Foster, Ph.D.

Through the windows of my carriage I could see the preparations for the bride's welcome as we drew up at the entranceway of Foulik Bey's palace. Two camels had been sacrificed, that I might walk across warm blood, and the poor beasts were still kicking feebly as I was taken from the carriage and led over the red stain that trickled from their severed throats. Slaves threw ears of wheat and gold coins in my path. An egg—symbol of fertility—was put beneath my foot to break as I stepped across the threshold of the *haremilk*. Ten *chamashirdji-kalfa,* or body slaves, greeted me with profound *temanas* as I came into the suite of rooms assigned to me. I had come "home."

LIFE in Foulik's harem was a counterpart of that I'd known in Yousouf's, except that it was stricter. I was a *hanum,* it was true, but I was fourth in rank, my husband's youngest wife, and subject to the wishes and commands of his first wife, or *hanum-ef-*

fendi, and the other two, as well. They took precedence when we went calling, muffled in our veils and mantles till we looked like meal-sacks. If one of them was present I must keep still till she spoke to me; if I were talking and an elder wife broke in, I had to pause respectfully till she had finished, and wait until she gave me leave before I spoke again.

My husband seemed quite fond of me, as he might have been fond of a dog or cat. Almost every night a slave came to conduct me to his private rooms, and on entering I had to throw myself face-downward on the floor and wait until he gave me leave to rise. Sometimes he talked to me, more often he amused himself by having me take down my hair so he could run his fingers through it. Occasionally I sang to him, and when I finished he rewarded me by holding out a lump of *halvah* or some candied rose or violet petals, which I nibbled from his hand. Once he forbore to bid me rise from my prostration on entering the room, and I knelt upon the threshold with my forehead to the floor for almost an hour. When finally he gave me leave to rise he told me he had kept me prostrate because he liked the way the lamplight shone upon my hair.

There was nothing like a book or magazine in the *haremlik,* and when I asked a eunuch to procure some for me he drew away as from contagion. That night I asked Foulik if I might have some French or English magazines, and he laughed as if I'd been unutterably funny. *"Ahee,* thou small piece of my heart, what wouldst thou do with such things?" he asked between chuckles. "Wouldst thou scan the pictures —Allah's curse upon their unbelieving makers!—like a woman of the *guelbi?* Couldst thou read them—thou, the daughter of a pious Moslem? *Wah,* what are books to thee, my little tree of jewels? What does a parrot know of the Koran, or a monkey of the taste of ginger?"

Then I made an error. I began to tease, and he beat me—not angrily or in a rage, but very thoroughly, laying on the rattan with methodical exactitude which showed he was no novice at the work. Before Foulik had finished the chastisement I was groveling on the rug before him, trembling and sobbing. When he threw the cane away I kissed his hand.

ONE MORNING Foulik Bey did not rise when the muezzin's call of prayer came quavering from the minaret of the near-by Mosque of Spears. His companion of the night had been the chicken-brained *hanum-effendi* Fathouma, who had half completed her orisons before she realized her lord still lay upon the silk mattress. When she spoke to him he did not answer. He did not move when she touched him. Then her strident *"A-hee-e-e-e!"* went shrilling through the *haremlik* like a siren sounding warning of a fire.

Presently the *bash-kalfa,* or chief slave, came to conduct us to the master's private suite. The room was thronged with women, wailing, shrieking, tearing their garments. I made my way through them and knelt beside the bed. Foulik lay upon his back, not dead, but certainly not sleeping. His head rolled back where the supporting pillow had slipped, or been jerked from underneath it, and his little pointed beard was thrust up truculently. Early sunlight blended with the lamplight in the room, shining on his finely chiseled face as he lay there at the end of his long road, the peace and wisdom —and fatigue—of eighty years upon

him. I took one of his narrow high-veined hands in mine and raised it to my brow in proper Moslem fashion. It was flaccid as a newly-dead man's. Only his low, stertorous breathing and the feeble throbbing of his pulse told me that he was still alive. Paralysis had left him nothing but the minimum equipment of survival, and any moment that might cease to function.

I knew I had to think fast. Almost five years as an inmate of the *haremlik* had brought me to the verge of madness. It had been close confinement more rigorous than a prison's, cut off from any contact with the world I'd known, without a single book or newspaper to tell me what went on beyond the harem's boundaries, with no one to talk to but a lot of ignorant and vapid women and an old man who regarded me as Westerners might regard a pet animal. For a year or more I'd racked my brain for some scheme to escape; now Allah put my prison's key into my hands. The whole plan—perfect to the last small detail—came to me in a flash of inspiration, and I began to put it into execution instantly.

Unconsciously I had been weeping, for Foulik had been kind to me according to his lights, and I was genuinely sorry for him. But it was art and not grief that made me give a sudden scream so piercing that it drowned the other women's lamentations out. "*Allah hadiq, ya sidi, ya abu!*—God guide thy footsteps, my lord, my father!" I shrilled, and with the nails of my left hand I raked my face from hair to chin, screaming all the whole.

Everybody in the overcrowded room looked at me with approval. By this demonstration of wifely devotion I had acquired merit, and their admiration increased steadily as I continued shrieking. Though I'd had it for five years, I had not plumbed the possibilities of my girl's-body, and did not realize how delicate and finely balanced its nervous system was. The first few screams I gave were conscious efforts, but in less than five minutes I was in hysterics, and when the European-trained doctor came to minister to Foulik Bey he had another patient on his hands. But underneath it all my mind was working perfectly.

Like most of the big houses of the *ancien régime,* Foulik Bey maintained a staff of servants large enough for a hotel. Most of these were slaves, but some of them were hired, and among the latter were the more important eunuchs. One of these, a young man named Reshad, I had picked as my most likely helper. He was Armenian by birth and had been captured by a band of raiding Turks when just an infant. By them he had been fitted for his calling and inducted into it, but when Mustapha Kemal reformed the Turkish social order he found himself at liberty and without employment, and had come to Egypt where there was a market for his services. There was some doubt about his orthodox Mohammedanism, but none at all about his love of money.

All the clothes and jewelry I'd had at Yousouf Pasha's had come with me to Foulik's as part of my dowry. Actually and legally they were no more mine than the costumes furnished to a chorus girl are hers, but I felt I'd bought them fairly with the sacrifice of manhood. The *hanum-effendi* readily granted my petition to be allowed to go daily to the mosque to pray for our lord's recovery, and for several days I went there, working myself into hysterics and acquiring a great reputation for piety. Then I began to extend my excursions.

No *hanum* might go out alone. A

eunuch sat upon the box beside the coachman, a slave sat in the carriage with her, and the enveloping *faradje* and *charsaf* made her look as sexless as a sack of meal with a flower-pot on top of it. Thus enveloped I could have smuggled almost anything smaller than a Rolls-Royce out with me, and bit by bit I took my jewels from the treasure chests and handed them to Reshad as he helped me from the coach. After praying I was always in a state of near-collapse; so I had an excellent excuse to be driven through the streets for some time before returning to the *haremlik*. Reshad found it convenient to direct our route past the counting-house of Himor Kimirian, who in addition to being a fellow Armenian was one of Cairo's shrewdest bankers and jewel brokers.

When most of my jewels were disposed of we were ready for our break. A Jewish friend of Kimirian's leased a small shop and to this I was driven on my way back from the mosque. Of course, the slave accompanied me into the place, but she saw nothing amiss when a woman assistant handed coffee to us. I don't know what the stuff contained, but it must have been most potent, for the girl had hardly swallowed it when she fell over in a stupor.

The rest was almost shamelessly easy. I left the shop by the back door, met Reshad in the alley and got into another carriage. In a short time we were at Kimirian's, where I changed my clothes, and within an hour I was on my way to Alexandria with nearly a million francs to my account at the *Crédit Lyonnais*, and a most artistically forged British passport in my reticule.

I KNEW just how a prisoner reprieved from life incarceration feels when I stepped from the Marseilles-Paris *train de grande vitesse*. I was a Comtesse de Monte Cristo, and the world was mine. I was young—at least it seemed the body they had given me was scarcely past its adolescence — beautiful and rich, and absolutely at a loose end. I reveled in my freedom, going on long shopping tours at Liberty's and the Galeries LaFayette, or the smaller, more exclusive shops, consulting skilled *coiffeurs and couturières*, riding, dining, going to the theater and the opera. I was catching up on all I'd missed of life during five years spent behind the harem's lattices, and loving every instant of it.

Then, gradually but surely, I became tired of myself. I still admired my woman's body and took pleasure in adorning it, but it and I—the real I—had not fused. When I was with men I felt like a man, and to come in contact with them roused purely masculine reactions. I could shake hands with them or touch them casually, but to be made love to by them outraged me as much as if I still wore a man's body. When I was with women I felt like a woman. There was pleasure but no thrill in kissing them or being kissed by them. Also, I soon discovered men were much the same in Europe as in Northern Africa, the principal distinction being that the Moslems were more frank about their attitude.

Finally I decided to come back to America. There would be a sort of bitter-sweet solace in visiting the scenes I knew so well and seeing all the friends I'd known, yet passing them unrecognized, like a ghost who haunts the scenes he'd known in life and watches his old friends while he remains invisible.

One of the first things that I did on my arrival was to visit the museum and make them a contribution. My gift,

plus my Egyptian "birth" and the knowledge of Egyptiana I displayed, won me the hearts of the directors, and I knew that in a little while I should be introduced to you.

You had been my closest boyhood friend and college chum; we'd shared almost every experience two men can share; twenty-five years' memories made a bond between us. Somehow, I felt when I met you I could make you understand I had been—still was—Lynne Foster. In you I'd find a man against whom I'd not have to be on guard. Perhaps, even, you'd go with me to Egypt and help me search out *slubbia* magicians whom we could bribe to change me back into a man.

I knew you'd be on hand when the New Wing was dedicated, and I timed my coming to meet you when you'd be almost ready to go home.

And then, my dear, we met.

It was *el ouad*—destiny. The moment that I raised my eyes to yours I knew. I was no longer a man imprisoned in a woman's body, but a woman, every inch—every cell and fiber—of me. When I put my hand in yours I felt a wild, tumultuous surf of longing breaking on my heart.

But between us hung a sword as merciless and potent as that the Angel held to bar Adam from Paradise. Something sharp, something cold and penetrating as a whetted, two-edged knife, was held between Ismet Foulik Hanum and Hugh Abernathy, and the barrier was the honed steel of my own remembering. For you were really you, while I had been—perhaps still was—Lynne Foster.

The realization of my love for you was like a rack on which my heart was torn to bleeding shreds as we rode home that night. I scarcely slept a moment after we had said goodby, but through the torment which I suffered one thought ran like an anodyne: "He will come tomorrow; he has asked to see me!"

Somehow, it seemed you *must* see through me; that any minute you would penetrate my disguise and see Lynne Foster underneath the masquerade of woman's flesh. But you didn't. I could see you didn't. In me you saw no one but Ismet Foulik, and with my newborn woman's intuition I could tell you loved me. But I dared not let you tell me so. I wanted you to kiss me—and to kiss you—with a longing which was almost past endurance, but until you knew the truth about me I could not surrender to you. Then, last night, before I had a chance to stop you. . . .

Heart's darling, you have heard my story. If you still want me . . .

* * * * *

He was down beside her on the hearth rug and his arms were warm about her as he kissed her hair, her brow, her eyes and lips, her throat, her heart, her little henna-painted hands and feet.

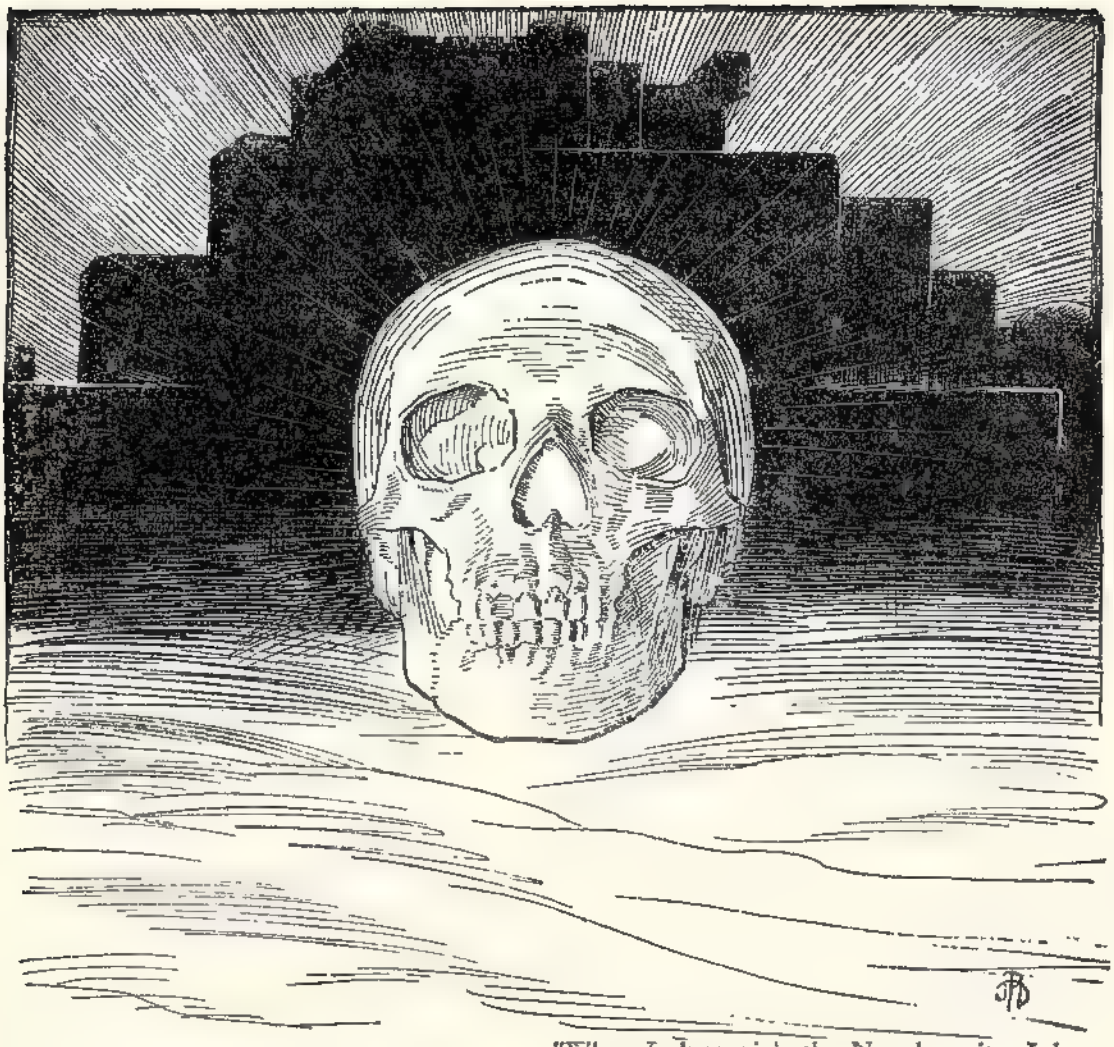
Presently: "You'll forget this terrible obsession, Ismet darling?" he whispered.

"Yes, beloved of my heart, if it will please you."

"You'll never think you are Lynne Foster?"

She lay back in his arms and looked at him, her eyes abrim with tears and worship.

"*Ya aini, ya amri*— oh, my life, my soul!" she answered in her high, clear voice. "Can't you understand? Ever since that night we met this spring Lynne Foster has been dead!"



"When I drew nigh the Nameless city, I knew it was accursed."

The Nameless City

By H. P. LOVECRAFT

It lay silent and dead under the cold desert moonlight, but what strange race inhabited the abyss under those cyclopean ruins?

WHEN I drew nigh the nameless city I knew it was accursed. I was traveling in a parched and terrible valley under the moon, and afar I saw it protruding uncannily above the sands as parts of a corpse might protrude from an ill-made grave. Fear spoke from the age-worn stones of this hoary survivor of the deluge, this great-grandmother of the

eldest pyramid; and a viewless aura repelled me and bade retreat from antique and sinister secrets that no man should see, and no man else had ever dared to see.

Remote in the desert of Araby lies the nameless city, crumbling and inarticulate, its low walls nearly hidden by the sands of uncounted ages. It must have been thus before the first stones of Memphis were laid, and while the bricks of Babylon were yet unbaked. There is no legend so old as to give it a name, or to recall that it was ever alive; but it is told of in whispers around campfires and muttered about by grandams in the tents of sheiks so that all the tribes shun it without wholly knowing why. It was of this place that Abdul Alhazred the mad poet dreamed on the night before he sang his unexplainable couplet:

> That is not dead which can eternal lie,
> And with strange eons even death may die.

I should have known that the Arabs had good reason for shunning the nameless city, the city told of in strange tales but seen by no living man; yet I defied them and went into the untrodden waste with my camel. I alone have seen it, and that is why no other face bears such hideous lines of fear as mine; why no other man shivers so horribly when the night wind rattles the windows. When I came upon it in the ghastly stillness of unending sleep it looked at me, chilly from the rays of a cold moon amidst the desert's heat. And as I returned its look I forgot my triumph at finding it, and stopped still with my camel to wait for the dawn.

For hours I waited, till the east grew gray and the stars faded, and the gray turned to roseate light edged with gold. I heard a moaning and saw a storm of sand stirring among the antique stones, though the sky was clear and the vast reaches of the desert still. Then suddenly above the desert's far rim came the blazing edge of the sun, seen through the tiny sandstorm which was passing away, and in my fevered state I fancied that from some remote depth there came a crash of musical metal to hail the fiery disk as Memnon hails it from the banks of the Nile. My ears rang and my imagination seethed as I led my camel slowly across the sand to that unvocal stone place; that place too old for Egypt and Meroë to remember; that place which I alone of living men had seen.

In and out amongst the shapeless foundations of houses and palaces I wandered, finding never a carving or inscription to tell of these men, if men they were, who built this city and dwelt therein so long ago. The antiquity of the spot was unwholesome, and I longed to encounter some sign or device to prove that the city was indeed fashioned by mankind. There were certain *proportions* and *dimensions* in the ruins which I did not like. I had with me many tools, and dug much within the walls of the obliterated edifices; but progress was slow, and nothing significant was revealed. When night and the moon returned I felt a chill wind which brought new fear, so that I did not dare to remain in the city. And as I went outside the antique walls to sleep, a small sighing sandstorm gathered behind me, blowing over the gray stones though the moon was bright and most of the desert still.

I AWAKED just at dawn from a pageant of horrible dreams, my ears ringing as from some metallic peal. I saw the sun peering redly through the last gusts of a little sandstorm that hovered over the nameless city, and

marked the quietness of the rest of the landscape. Once more I ventured within those brooding ruins that swelled beneath the sand like an ogre under a coverlet, and again dug vainly for relics of the forgotten race. At noon I rested, and in the afternoon I spent much time tracing the walls and the bygone streets, and the outlines of the nearly vanished buildings. I saw that the city had been mighty indeed, and wondered at the sources of its greatness. To myself I pictured all the splendors of an age so distant that Chaldea could not recall it, and thought of Sarnath the Doomed, that stood in the land Mnar when mankind was young, and of Ib, that was carven of gray stone before mankind existed.

All at once I came upon a place where the bed-rock rose stark through the sand and formed a low cliff; and here I saw with joy what seemed to promise further traces of the antediluvian people. Hewn rudely on the face of the cliff were the unmistakable façades of several small, squat rock houses or temples, whose interiors might preserve many secrets of ages too remote for calculation, though sandstorms had long since effaced any carvings which may have been outside.

Very low and sand-choked were all of the dark apertures near me, but I cleared one with my spade and crawled through it, carrying a torch to reveal whatever mysteries it might hold. When I was inside I saw that the cavern was indeed a temple, and beheld plain signs of the race that had lived and worshipped before the desert was a desert. Primitive altars, pillars, and niches, all curiously low, were not absent; and though I saw no sculptures nor frescoes, there were many singular stones clearly shaped into symbols by artificial means. The lowness of the chiselled chamber was very strange, for I could hardly kneel upright; but the area was so great that my torch showed only part of it at a time. I shuddered oddly in some of the far corners; for certain altars and stones suggested forgotten rites of terrible, revolting, and inexplicable nature and made me wonder what manner of men could have made and frequented such a temple. When I had seen all that the place contained, I crawled out again, avid to find what the other temples might yield.

NIGHT had now approached, yet the tangible things I had seen made curiosity stronger than fear, so that I did not flee from the long moon-cast shadows that had daunted me when first I saw the nameless city. In the twilight I cleared another aperture and with a new torch crawled into it, finding more vague stones and symbols, though nothing more definite than the other temple had contained. The room was just as low, but much less broad, ending in a very narrow passage crowded with obscure and cryptical shrines. About these shrines I was prying when the noise of a wind and of my camel outside broke through the stillness and drew me forth to see what could have frightened the beast.

The moon was gleaming vividly over the primitive ruins, lighting a dense cloud of sand that seemed blown by a strong but decreasing wind from some point along the cliff ahead of me. I knew it was this chilly, sandy wind which had disturbed the camel and was about to lead him to a place of better shelter when I chanced to glance up and saw that there was no wind atop the cliff. This astonished me and made me fearful again, but I immediately recalled the sudden local winds that I

had seen and heard before at sunrise and sunset, and judged it was a normal thing. I decided it came from some rock fissure leading to a cave, and watched the troubled sand to trace it to its source; soon perceiving that it came from the black orifice of a temple a long distance south of me almost out of sight. Against the choking sand-cloud I plodded toward this temple, which, as I neared it, loomed larger than the rest, and showed a doorway far less clogged with caked sand. I would have entered had not the terrific force of the icy wind almost quenched my torch. It poured madly out of the dark door, sighing uncannily as it ruffled the sand and spread among the weird ruins. Soon it grew fainter and the sand grew more and more still, till finally all was at rest again; but a presence seemed stalking among the spectral stones of the city, and when I glanced at the moon it seemed to quiver as though mirrored in unquiet waters. I was more afraid than I could explain, but not enough to dull my thirst for wonder; so as soon as the wind was quite gone I crossed into the dark chamber from which it had come.

THIS temple, as I had fancied from the outside, was larger than either of those I had visited before; and was presumably a natural cavern since it bore winds from some region beyond. Here I could stand quite upright, but saw that the stones and altars were as low as those in the other temples. On the walls and roof I beheld for the first time some traces of the pictorial art of the ancient race, curious curling streaks of paint that had almost faded or crumbled away; and on two of the altars I saw with rising excitement a maze of well-fashioned curvilinear carvings. As I held my torch aloft it seemed to me that the shape of the roof was too regular to be natural, and I wondered what the prehistoric cutters of stone had first worked upon. Their engineering skill must have been vast.

Then a bright flare of the fantastic flame showed me that for which I had been seeking, the opening to those remoter abysses whence the sudden wind had blown; and I grew faint when I saw that it was a small and plainly *artificial* door chiselled in the solid rock. I thrust my torch within, beholding a black tunnel with the roof arching low over a rough flight of very small, numerous, and steeply descending steps. I shall always see those steps in my dreams, for I came to learn what they meant. At the time I hardly knew whether to call them steps or mere footholds in a precipitous descent. My mind was whirling with mad thoughts, and the words and warnings of Arab prophets seemed to float across the desert from the lands that men know to the nameless city that men dare not know. Yet I hesitated only a moment before advancing through the portal and commencing to climb cautiously down the steep passage, feet first, as though on a ladder.

It is only in the terrible phantasms of drugs or delirium that any other man can have such a descent as mine. The narrow passage led infinitely down like some hideous haunted well, and the torch I held above my head could not light the unknown depths toward which I was crawling. I lost track of the hours and forgot to consult my watch, though I was frightened when I thought of the distance I must be traversing. There were changes of direction and of steepness; and once I came to a long, low level passage

where I had to wriggle feet first along the rocky floor, holding the torch at arm's length beyond my head. The place not high enough for kneeling. After that were more of the steep steps, and I was still scrambling down interminably when my failing torch died out. I do not think I noticed it at the time, for when I did notice it I was still holding it above me as if it were ablaze. I was quite unbalanced with that instinct for the strange and the unknown which had made me a wanderer upon earth and a haunter of far, ancient, and forbidden places.

In the darkness there flashed before my mind fragments of my cherished treasury of demoniac lore; sentences from Alhazred the mad Arab, paragraphs from the apocryphal nightmares of Damascus, and infamous lines from the delirious *Image du Monde* of Gauthier de Metz. I repeated queer extracts, and muttered of Afrasiab and the demons that floated with him down the Oxus; later chanting over and over again a phrase from one of Lord Dunsany's tales—"the unreverberate blackness of the abyss." Once when the descent grew amazingly steep I recited something in singsong from Thomas Moore until I feared to recite more:

> A reservoir of darkness, black
> As witches' cauldrons are, when fill'd
> With moon-drugs in th' eclipse distill'd.
> Leaning to look if foot might pass
> Down thro' that chasm, I saw, beneath,
> As far as vision could explore,
> The jetty sides as smooth as glass,
> Looking as if just varnish'd o'er
> With that dark pitch the Sea of Death
> Throws out upon its slimy shore.

TIME had quite ceased to exist when my feet again felt a level floor, and I found myself in a place slightly higher than the rooms in the two smaller temples now so incalculably far above my head. I could not quite stand, but could kneel upright, and in the dark I shuffled and crept hither and thither at random. I soon knew that I was in a narrow passage whose walls were lined with cases of wood having glass fronts. As in that paleozotic and abysmal place I felt of such things as polished wood and glass I shuddered at the possible implications. The cases were apparently ranged along each side of the passage at regular intervals, and were oblong and horizontal, hideously like coffins in shape and size. When I tried to move two or three for further examination, I found that they were firmly fastened.

I saw that the passage was a long one, so floundered ahead rapidly in a creeping run that would have seemed horrible had any eye watched me in the blackness; crossing from side to side occasionally to feel of my surroundings and be sure the walls and rows of cases still stretched on. Man is so used to thinking visually that I almost forgot the darkness and pictured the endless corridor of wood and glass in its low-studded monotony as though I saw it. And then in a moment of indescribable emotion I did see it.

Just when my fancy merged into real sight I cannot tell; but there came a gradual glow ahead, and all at once I knew that I saw the dim outlines of the corridor and the cases, revealed by some unknown subterranean phosphorescence. For a little while all was exactly as I had imagined it, since the glow was very faint; but as I mechanically kept stumbling ahead into the stronger light I realized that my fancy had been but feeble. This hall was no relic of crudity like the temples in the city above, but a monument of the most magnificent and exotic art. Rich, vivid, and daringly fantastic designs and pictures formed a continuous scheme of

mural painting whose lines and colors were beyond description. The cases were of a strange golden wood, with fronts of exquisite glass, and containing the mummified forms of creatures outreaching in grotesqueness the most chaotic dreams of man.

To convey any idea of these monstrosities is impossible. They were of the reptile kind, with body lines suggesting sometimes the crocodile, sometimes the seal, but more often nothing of which either the naturalist or the paleontologist ever heard. In size they approximated a small man, and their forelegs bore delicate and evidently flexible feet curiously like human hands and fingers. But strangest of all were their heads, which presented a contour violating all known biological principles. To nothing can such things be well compared—in one flash I thought of comparisons as varied as the cat, the bulldog, the mythic satyr, and the human being. Not Jove himself had had so colossal and protuberant a forehead; yet the horns and the noselessness and the alligator-like jaw placed the things outside all established categories. I debated for a time on the reality of the mummies, half suspecting they were artificial idols; but soon decided they were indeed some paleogean species which had lived when the nameless city was alive. To crown their grotesqueness, most of them were gorgeously enrobed in the costliest of fabrics, and lavishly laden with ornaments of gold, jewels, and unknown shining metals.

The importance of these crawling creatures must have been vast, for they held first place among the wild designs on the frescoed walls and ceiling. With matchless skill had the artist drawn them in a world of their own, wherein they had cities and gardens fashioned to suit their dimensions; and I could not help but think that their pictured history was allegorical, perhaps showing the progress of the race that worshipped them. These creatures, I said to myself, were to the men of the nameless city what the she-wolf was to Rome, or some totem-beast is to a tribe of Indians.

Holding this view, I thought I could trace roughly a wonderful epic of the nameless city; the tale of a mighty seacoast metropolis that ruled the world before Africa rose out of the waves, and of its struggles as the sea shrank away, and the desert crept into the fertile valley that held it. I saw its wars and triumphs, its troubles and defeats, and afterward its terrible fight against the desert when thousands of its people here represented in allegory by the grotesque reptiles were driven to chisel their way down through the rocks in some marvelous manner to another world whereof their prophets had told them. It was all vividly weird and realistic, and its connection with the awesome descent I had made was unmistakable. I even recognized the passages.

As I crept along the corridor toward the brighter light I saw later stages of the painted epic—the leave-taking of the race that had dwelt in the nameless city and the valley around for ten million years; the race whose souls shrank from quitting scenes their bodies had known so long where they had settled as nomads in the earth's youth, hewing in the virgin rock those primal shrines at which they had never ceased to worship. Now that the light was better I studied the pictures more closely and, remembering that the strange reptiles must represent the unknown men, pondered upon the cus-

toms of the nameless city. Many things were peculiar and inexplicable. The civilization, which included a written alphabet, had seemingly risen to a higher order than those immeasurably later civilizations of Egypt and Chaldea, yet there were curious omissions. I could, for example, find no pictures to represent deaths or funeral customs, save such as were related to wars, violence, and plagues; and I wondered at the reticence shown concerning natural death. It was as though an ideal of immortality had been fostered as a cheering illusion.

STILL nearer the end of the passage were painted scenes of the utmost picturesqueness and extravagance; contrasted views of the nameless city in its desertion and growing ruin, and of the strange new realm of paradise to which the race had hewed its way through the stone. In these views the city and the desert valley were shown always by moonlight, a golden nimbus hovering over the fallen walls and half revealing the splendid perfection of former times, shown spectrally and elusively by the artist. The paradisal scenes were almost too extravagant to be believed, portraying a hidden world of eternal day filled with glorious cities and ethereal hills and valleys.

At the very last I thought I saw signs of an artistic anticlimax. The paintings were less skilful, and much more bizarre than even the wildest of the earlier scenes. They seemed to record a slow decadence of the ancient stock, coupled with a growing ferocity toward the outside world from which it was driven by the desert. The forms of the people—always represented by the sacred reptiles—appeared to be gradually wasting away, though their spirits as shown hovering above the ruins by moonlight gained in proportion. Emaciated priests, displayed as reptiles in ornate robes, cursed the upper air and all who breathed it; and one terrible final scene showed a primitive-looking man, perhaps a pioneer of ancient Irem, the City of Pillars, torn to pieces by members of the older race. I remembered how the Arabs fear the nameless city, and was glad that beyond this place the gray walls and ceiling were bare.

As I viewed the pageant of mural history I had approached very closely the end of the low-ceiled hall, and was aware of a gate through which came all of the illuminating phosphorescence. Creeping up to it, I cried aloud in transcendent amazement at what lay beyond; for instead of other and brighter chambers there was only an illimitable void of uniform radiance, such as one might fancy when gazing down from the peak of Mount Everest upon a sea of sunlit mist. Behind me was a passage so cramped that I could not stand upright in it; before me was an infinity of subterranean effulgence.

Reaching down from the passage into the abyss was the head of a steep flight of steps—small, numerous steps like those of the black passages I had traversed—but after a few feet the glowing vapors concealed everything. Swung back open against the left-hand wall of the passage was a massive door of brass, incredibly thick and decorated with fantastic bas-reliefs, which could if closed shut the whole inner world of light away from the vaults and passages of rock. I looked at the steps, and for the nonce dared not try them. I touched the open brass door, and could not move it. Then I sank prone to the stone floor, my mind aflame with prodigious reflections which not even a death-like exhaustion could banish.

As I lay still with closed eyes, free to ponder, many things I had lightly noted in the frescoes came back to me with new and terrible significance—scenes representing the nameless city in its heyday, the vegetation of the valley around it, and the distant lands with which its merchants traded. The allegory of the crawling creatures puzzled me by its universal prominence, and I wondered that it should be so closely followed in a pictured history of such importance. In the frescoes the nameless city had been shown in proportions fitted to the reptiles. I wondered what its real proportions and magnificence had been, and reflected a moment on certain oddities I had noticed in the ruins. I thought curiously of the lowness of the primal temples and of the underground corridor, which were doubtless hewn thus out of deference to the reptile deities there honored; though it perforce reduced the worshippers to crawling. Perhaps the very rites here involved a crawling in imitation of the creatures. No religious theory, however, could easily explain why the level passage in the awesome descent should be as low as the temples—or lower, since one could not even kneel in it. As I thought of the crawling creatures, whose hideous mummified forms were so close to me, I felt a new throb of fear. Mental associations are curious, and I shrank from the idea that except for the poor primitive man torn to pieces in the last painting, mine was the only human form amidst the many relics and symbols of primordial life.

But as always in my strange and roving existence, wonder soon drove out fear; for the luminous abyss and what it might contain presented a problem worthy of the greatest explorer. That a weird world of mystery lay far down that flight of peculiarly small steps I could not doubt, and I hoped to find there those human memorials which the painted corridor had failed to give. The frescoes had pictured unbelievable cities and valleys in this lower realm, and my fancy dwelt on the rich and colossal ruins that awaited me.

My fears, indeed, concerned the past rather than the future. Not even the physical horror of my position in that cramped corridor of dead reptiles and antediluvian frescoes, miles below the world I knew and faced by another world of eery light and mist, could match the lethal dread I felt at the abysmal antiquity of the scene and its soul. An ancientness so vast that measurement is feeble seemed to leer down from the primal stones and rock-hewn temples of the nameless city, while the very latest of the astounding maps in the frescoes showed oceans and continents that man has forgotten, with only here and there some vaguely familiar outline. Of what could have happened in the geological ages since the paintings ceased and the death-hating race resentfully succumbed to decay, no man might say. Life had once teemed in these caverns and in the luminous realm beyond; now I was alone with vivid relics, and I trembled to think of the countless ages through which these relics had kept a silent, deserted vigil.

Suddenly there came another burst of that acute fear which had intermittently seized me ever since I first saw the terrible valley and the nameless city under a cold moon, and despite my exhaustion I found myself starting frantically to a sitting posture and gazing back along the black corridor toward the tunnels that rose to the outer world. My sensations were like those

which had made me shun the nameless city at night, and were as inexplicable as they were poignant. In another moment, however, I received a still greater shock in the form of a definite sound—the first which had broken the utter silence of these tomb-like depths. It was a deep, low moaning, as of a distant throng of condemned spirits, and came from the direction in which I was staring. Its volume rapidly grew, till soon it reverberated frightfully through the low passage, and at the same time I became conscious of an increasing draft of cold air, likewise flowing from the tunnels and the city above.

The touch of this air seemed to restore my balance, for I instantly recalled the sudden gusts which had risen around the mouth of the abyss each sunset and sunrise, one of which had indeed revealed the hidden tunnels to me. I looked at my watch and saw that sunrise was near, so braced myself to resist the gale that was sweeping down to its cavern home as it had swept forth at evening. My fear again waned low, since a natural phenomenon tends to dispel broodings over the unknown.

More and more madly poured the shrieking, moaning night wind into that gulf of the inner earth. I dropped prone again and clutched vainly at the floor for fear of being swept bodily through the open gate into the phosphorescent abyss. Such fury I had not expected, and as I grew aware of an actual slipping of my form toward the abyss I was beset by a thousand new terrors of apprehension and imagination.

The malignancy of the blast awakened incredible fancies; once more I compared myself shudderingly to the only human image in that frightful corridor, the man who was torn to pieces by the nameless race, for in the fiendish clawing of the swirling currents there seemed to abide a vindictive rage all the stronger because it was largely impotent.

I think I screamed frantically near the last—I was almost mad—but if I did so my cries were lost in the hell-born babel of the howling wind-wraiths. I tried to crawl against the murderous invisible torrent, but I could not even hold my own as I was pushed slowly and inexorably toward the unknown world. Finally reason must have wholly snapped; for I fell to babbling over and over that unexplainable couplet of the mad Arab Alhazred, who dreamed of the nameless city:

> That is not dead which can eternal lie,
> And with strange eons even death may die.

Only the grim brooding desert gods know what really took place—what indescribable struggles and scrambles in the dark I endured or what Abaddon guided me back to life, where I must always remember and shiver in the night wind till oblivion—or worse—claims me. Monstrous, unnatural, colossal, was the thing—too far beyond all the ideas of man to be believed except in the silent damnable small hours of the morning when one cannot sleep.

I HAVE said that the fury of the rushing blast was infernal—cacodemoniacal—and that its voices were hideous with the pent-up viciousness of desolate eternities. Presently these voices, while still chaotic before me, seemed to my beating brain to take articulate form behind me; and down there in the grave of unnumbered eon-dead antiquities, leagues below the dawn-lit world of men, I heard the ghastly cursing and snarling of strange-tongued fiends. Turning, I saw outlined against the luminous æther of the

abyss what could not be seen against the dusk of the corridor—a nightmare horde of rushing devils; hate-distorted, grotesquely panoplied, half-transparent devils of a race no man might mistake —the crawling reptiles of the nameless city.

And as the wind died away I was plunged into the ghoul-peopled darkness of earth's bowels; for behind the last of the creatures the great brazen door clanged shut with a deafening peal of metallic music whose reverberations swelled out to the distant world to hail the rising sun as Memnon hails it from the banks of the Nile.

Recompense

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

I have not heard lutes beckon me, nor the brazen bugles call,
But once in the dim of a haunted lea I heard the silence fall.
I have not heard the regal drum, nor seen the flags unfurled,
But I have watched the dragons come, fire-eyed, across the world.

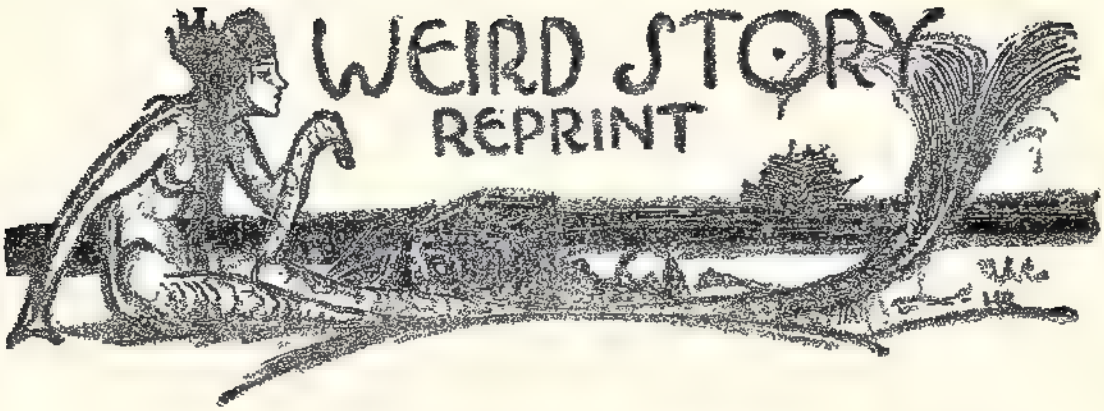
I have not seen the horsemen fall before the hurtling host,
But I have paced a silent hall where each step waked a ghost.
I have not kissed the tiger-feet of a strange-eyed golden god,
But I have walked a city's street where no man else had trod.

I have not raised the canopies that shelter revelling kings,
But I have fled from crimson eyes and black unearthly wings.
I have not knelt outside the door to kiss a pallid queen,
But I have seen a ghostly shore that no man else has seen.

I have not seen the standards sweep from keep and castle wall,
But I have seen a woman leap from a dragon's crimson stall,
And I have heard strange surges boom that no man heard before,
And seen a strange black city loom on a mystic night-black shore.

And I have felt the sudden blow of a nameless wind's cold breath,
And watched the grisly pilgrims go that walk the roads of Death,
And I have seen black valleys gape, abysses in the gloom,
And I have fought the deathless Ape that guards the Doors of Doom.

I have not seen the face of Pan, nor mocked the dryad's haste,
But I have trailed a dark-eyed Man across a windy waste.
I have not died as men may die, nor sinned as men have sinned,
But I have reached a misty sky upon a granite wind.



Leonora

By EVERIL WORRELL

I AM writing this because I shall not long be able to write it. Why does one long for the understanding and sympathy of his fellow beings—long to have that, even after the worst has befallen and he has gone from this life to that which awaits him? How many bottles laden with last messages float on lonely, unknown ocean surges, or sink to the bottom of the sea?

It will be so with this, my last message. That is, it will be uncredited, unbelieved, uncomprehended, although it will doubtless be read. But I have told my story many times, and heard them say that I am mad. I know they will say that, after I am gone—gone from behind these bars into the horrors of the fate that will overtake my spirit somewhere out in the open spaces and the blackness of night into which it will go. *He* will be there, one of the shadows that lurk in old cemeteries and sweep across lonely roads where the winds moan and wander homeless and hopeless across the waste spaces of the earth from dusk till dawn. Dawn!

From WEIRD TALES for January, 1927.

But I will tell my story for the last time.

Even now, my years are those of a young girl. I am only seventeen, and they say I have been mad more than a year. When I was sixteen, my eyes were bright and my cheeks red with a color that did not come off when I washed my face. I lived in the country, and I was an old-fashioned girl in many ways. I roamed freely over the countryside, and my wanderings were shared by my only close friend, or else were lonely. The name of my friend was Margaret. Mine was Leonora.

The two of us lived only a quarter of a mile apart, and between us ran a lonely little road crossed by another like it. Our parents believed that it was safe for us, or for any child, to traverse this road between our houses alone at any hour. We had done it from our youngest days. It should have been safe, for we were far from cities, and malefactors of any sort were utterly unknown in our secluded part of the country. There were disadvantages attendant on living in such isolation, but there were advantages, too. Mar-

garet's family were simple farmer folk of sterling worth. My father was a student of some means, who could afford to let the world go by.

On dark or stormy nights, sundown generally found me safe indoors for the night, spending the evening by the open fire. Moonlight nights I loved, and on nights when the moon was bright I often stayed at Margaret's house, taking advantage of my freedom to wander home alone as late as midnight. Sometimes Margaret did this, too, staying late with me and going home without thought of fear; but I was the venturesome one, the one who loved to be abroad in the moonlight. . . .

Do horrors such as come to me march toward one from the hour of birth, so that every trait, every characteristic is inclined to meet them?

Up to my sixteenth birthday, my life had been like a placid stream. It had been without excitement, and almost without incident. Perhaps its very calm had made me ready for adventure.

On my sixteenth birthday, Margaret dined at my house and I supped with her. It was our idea of a celebration. It was October, and the night of the full moon. I did not start home until nearly midnight. I would not reach home until a little after that, but that would not matter, because my father would be asleep in bed, and, in any case, not worried about me or interested in the hour of my arrival. The bright colors of autumn leaves, strongely softened and dimmed in the moonlight, rose all around me. Single leaves drifted through the still air and fell at my feet. The moon had reached mid-heaven, and the sky was like purple velvet.

I was happy. It was too beautiful a night to go home. It was a night to enjoy to the fullest—to wander through, going over strange roads, going farther than I had ever gone. I threw out my arms in the moonlight, posing like a picture of a dancing girl which my father had—I had never seen a dancer!—and flitted down the road. As I reached the cross-road, the sound of our clock chiming midnight drifted to my ears, and I stopped.

A beautiful high-powered car stood just at the entrance to our road, its headlights off, its parking lights hardly noticeable in the brilliant moonlight.

I knew it was a fine car, because my father had one, and on rare occasions the fit took him to drive it. When he drove it I went with him, and I noticed cars, for I loved them. I loved their strength and speed, and their fine lines. I loved to rush through the air in my father's car, and was never happier than when I could coax him to drive the twenty miles to the state road, and go fast on the perfect paving. But aside from my father's car, I had never seen a good one on these little back country roads.

I stopped, although I knew I ought to go on. And as I stopped just short of the cross-road, the big car glided softly forward a few feet until it stopped, blocking the road to my father's house. My father's motor was a silent one; but this car actually moved without the slightest sound.

Until now I had not seen the driver. Now I looked at him.

His face was shadowy in the moonlight. Perhaps it did not catch the direct light. There was a suggestion of strong, very sharply cut features, of a smile and a deep-set gaze. . . .

My pen shakes until I can hardly write the words. But I heard the doctor say today that I had nearly reached

the end of my strength, and any night with its horrors may be the end. I must control myself and think of the things I am writing down as they seemed to me at the time.

I was just turned sixteen, and this was romance. And so I stopped and talked to him, although we exchanged few words. That night he did not ask me to ride with him, and so I was less afraid. For with the romance was fear —but I answered his questions.

"What is your name?" he asked; and I answered, "Leonora."

"It is music in my ears," he said softly; and again, I felt that this was romance. I felt it again, when he added: "I have been looking for you for a long time."

Of course, I did not dream—I did not think that he meant that. I had read novels, and love stories. I knew how to take a compliment.

"Do you often pass this way as late as this?"

Something made me hesitate. But something about him, something about our meeting alone in the moonlight, fascinated me. If I said "no," perhaps I would never see him again.

"Very often, when the moon is full," I said, and moved to go around the car. In a moment the gloved hand that rested on the wheel had touched the broad brim of his hat; another movement, and the car shot silently ahead and was gone.

I RAN home with a beating heart. My last words had almost made a rendezvous of the night of the next full moon. If I desired, there might be another encounter.

Yet it was two months later when we met again. The very next full moon had been clear, cloudless, frostily cold —and a lovely November night. But that night I was so afraid that I even avoided the full light of the moon when I crossed our yard in the early evening to bring in a book I had left lying outside. At the thought of traversing the road that led to Margaret's house, every instinct within me rebelled. At midnight, I was lying in my bed, with the covers drawn close around me, and my wide-open eyes turned resolutely away from the patch of moonlight that lay, deathly white, beneath my open window. I was like a person in a nervous fit—I, who had never known the meaning of nerves.

But the second month, it was different.

After all, it was a fine thing to have mystery and romance, for the taking, mine. Or were they mine for the taking? Perhaps the man in the long, low car had never come again, would never come again. But his voice had promised something different. Would he be there tonight? Had he been there a month ago? Curiosity began to drive me before it. After all, he had made no move to harm me. And there had been something about him, something that drew and drew me. Surely my childish fears were the height of folly—the product of my loneliness.

I went to Margaret's, and stayed late—almost, as on that other night, until the clock struck 12. At last, with a self-consciousness that was noticeable only to me, I wrapped my heavy coat around me and went out into the night.

The night had changed. It was bitterly cold, and there was a heavy, freezing mist in the air which lay thickly in the hollows. The shadows of the bare trees struck through the dismal vapors like dangling limbs of skeletons. . . .

What am I writing, thinking of? The scream that pierced the night, I

could not suppress. I must control myself, or they will come and silence me. And I must finish this tonight. I must finish it before the hour of dawn. That is the hour I fear, worse than the hour of midnight.

It is the hour when Those outside must seek their dreadful homes, the hour when striking fleshless fingers against my window-pane is not enough, but They would take me with Them where They go—where I, but not another living soul, have been before! And whence I never shall escape again.

I walked down, slowly, toward the cross-road. I would not have lingered. I would have been glad to find the cross-road empty. It was not.

There stood the car, black—I had not noticed its color before—low-hung, spectral fingers of white light from its cowl lights piercing the mist. The cross-road was in the hollow, and the mist lay very heavily there—so heavily that I could hardly breathe.

He was there in the car, his face more indistinct in the shadow of his broad-brimmed hat than it had been before, I thought, his gloved hand resting as before upon the wheel. And again, with a thrill of fear, there went a thrill of fascination through me. He was different!—different from everyone else, I felt. Strangeness, romance—and his manner was that of a lover. In my inexperience, I knew it.

"Will you ride tonight, Leonora?"

It had come—the next advance—the invitation!

But I was not going with him. I had got the thrill I had come for. He had asked me, and that was enough. It was enough, now, if I never saw him again. This was a better stopping-point. (Remember that I was only sixteen.)

A stranger had come out of the night, had been mysteriously attracted to me, and I to him. He had asked me to ride with him.

I do not know what I said. Somehow, I must have communicated to him what I felt—my pleasure in being asked, my refusal.

His gloved hand touched his hat in the farewell gesture I remembered.

"Another night, Leonora. Leonora!"

The car glided forward and was gone. But the echo of his voice was in my ears. His voice—deep, strange, *different*—but the voice of a lover. My inexperience was sure. And already I doubted if, after all, this would be enough for me if I never saw him again. Another time, he would be as punctilious, as little urgent. But he might say—what would he say?

The January moon we hardly saw, so bitter were the storms of that winter, so unbreaking the heavy clouds that shut us from the sky.

The February full moon was crystal-clear in a sky of icy light. The snow-covered ground sparkled, and the branches of the trees were ice-coated, and burned with white fire. But I clung to the fireside, and again crept early within my blankets, drawing them over my head. I was in the grip of the fear that had visited me before. I was like a person in the grip of a phobia, such as they say that I have now, shunning the moonlight and the open air.

It was March.

Next month would bring the spring, and then would follow summer. The world would be a soft and gentle world again, in which fear would have no place. Yet I began to long for a repetition of the meetings at the cross-road, a repetition that should have the same setting—the rigors of winter, rather than the entirely different surroundings of the season of new buds

and new life. My last attack of unreasoning terror had passed away again, and again it seemed as though it left behind it a reaction that urged me more strongly than ever toward adventure.

Had *he* been at the cross-road in the bitter storms of January, and on the sparkling white night which I spent close indoors? Would he be there on the night of the next full moon, the March moon?

There was still no breath of spring in the air on that night. The winter's snow lay in the hollows, no longer whitely sparkling, but spoiled by the cold rains that had come since it had fallen.

The night sky was wild with wind-torn clouds, and the moonlight was now clear and brilliant, now weirdly dim, and again swept away by great, black, sweeping shadows. The air was full of the smell of damp earth and rotted leaves.

I did not go to Margaret's. I sat by the fire, dreaming strange dreams, while the clock ticked the hours slowly by, and the fire sank low. At 11, my father yawned and went up to his room. At a quarter before 12, I took my heavy cloak, and wrapped it around me. A little later, I went out.

I knew that I would find him waiting. There was no doubt of that tonight. It was not curiosity that drove me, but some deeper urge, some urge I know no name for. I was like a swimmer in a dangerous current, caught at last by the undertow.

The car stood in the cross-road, low and dark. Although it was a finely made machine, I was sure, it seemed to me for the first time to be in some way *very* peculiar. But at that moment a cloud swept across the face of the moon, and I lost interest in the matter, with a last vague thought that it must be of foreign make.

Then, suddenly, I was aware that for the first time the stranger had opened the door of the car before me. Indeed, this was the first time I had approached on the side of the vacant seat beside the driver.

"We ride tonight, Leonora. Why not? And what else did you come out for?"

That was true. For the first time I now met him, not on my way home, not on my way anywhere. I had met him, only to meet him. And he expected me to ride. He had never forced, or tried to urge me, but tonight he expected me to ride. Wouldn't it seem silly to have come out only to exchange two or three words and go back, and wouldn't it be better to go with him? A less inexperienced girl might take the trouble to leave her house on a stormy March night for the sake of a real adventure—only a very green country girl would have come out at all for less. I would go.

I had entered the car. I sat beside him, and when the moon shone out brightly I tried to study his face as he started the car down the narrow road. I met with no success. I had become conscious of a burning anxiety to see more clearly what was the manner of this man who had been the subject of so much speculation, the reason of so many dreams. But here beside him I could see no more clearly than I had seen him from the road. The side of his face which was turned toward me, and which was partly exposed between the deep-brimmed hat and the turned-up collar of his cloak, was still deeply shaded by the car itself; so that I had the same elusive impression as before, of strong, sharp features, a deep-set gaze, a smiling expression. . . .

WE DROVE fast, over strange roads, So closely was my attention centered upon my companion, that I did not concern myself with the way we went. Later, I was to become uneasy over the distance we had traversed; but when I did, he reassured me, and I believed that we were then on our way home, and nearly there. I thought he meant by home, my father's house; and had I not thought that, my wildest nightmare could not have whispered to me what it was that *he* called "home"!

He was very silent. I spoke little, and he seldom answered me. That did not alarm me as it might have done, because of my ever-present conviction of my childishness, my crudeness. I blamed myself because my remarks were so stupid that they were not worth a reply, and the taciturnity that so embarrassed me yet added to the fascination that made me sit motionless hour after hour, longing more than anything else in the world to get a good look at the face beside me, to arouse more interest in my companion.

Once only, he spoke of his own accord. He asked me why I was called Leonora.

I asked him if he did not think it was a pretty name, remembering how he had said at our first meeting that it was "music in his ears." But I was disappointed, for he did not compliment my name again.

"Some would say it was an ill-starred name. But, luckily, people are not superstitious as they used to be."

"If that is lucky, you can not call it ill-starred."

I wanted to provoke him into talking more to me. I wanted his attention. But he did not answer me.

I can not go on. I can not finish my story as I intended to do, telling things as they happened, in their right order. There are things I must explain, things that people have said about me that I must deny. And the night is growing late, and the rapping I hear all night long upon my window-pane, between the bars that shut me in but that will soon protect me no longer, is growing louder—as the dawn approaches. The pain in my heart, of which the doctor has said I would die soon, is growing unendurable. And when I come to the end of my story—*to the end, which I will set down*—I do not know what will happen then. But that which I am to write of is so dreadful that I have never dared to think of it. Not of that itself, but of the horrible ending to the story I am telling.

I must finish before the dawn, for it is at the dawn that They must go, and it is then that They would take me—where *he* waits for me, always at dawn.

But to explain first—people say I am mad. You who will read this will doubtless believe them. But tell me this:

Where was I from the time I disappeared from my father's house until I was found, "mad," as they say, and clutching in my frenzied grasp—the finger of a skeleton? In what dread struggle did I tear that finger loose, and from what dreadful hand? And although I, a living woman, could not remain in the abode of death, if I have not been touched by the very finger of death, then tell me this:

Why is my flesh like the flesh of the dead, so that the doctors say it is like leprous flesh, although it is not leprous? Would God it were!

Now, let me go on.

OUR SILENT DRIVE continued through the flying hours. Flying hours, for I was unconscious of the lapse of time, excepting for the once when I vaguely

became uneasy at our long journey, and was reassured. Had he who sat behind the wheel refused to answer my questioning then, perhaps I would then have become frantic with terror. But his deep, soothing voice worked a spell on me once more; and in his reply I thought I could detect a real solicitude which comforted me. I was assured that we would shortly reach my father's house; I would slip in before my father could possibly have waked, and avoid questioning.

As the night grew older, it became more dismal. The moon which had swung high overhead sent long shadows scurrying from every tree and shrub, every hill and hummock, as we dashed by. The wind had fallen, but yet blew hard enough to make a moaning, wailing sound which seemed to follow us through the night. The clouds that had swept in great masses across the sky had changed their shapes, and trailed in long, somber, broken streamers like torn black banners. The smell of dank, soggy earth and rotting leaves, of mold and decay, was heavier since the wind had sunk a little. Suddenly, I had a great need for reassurance and comfort. My heart seemed breaking with loneliness, and with a strange, unreasoning despair.

I turned to the silent figure at my side. And it seemed that *he* smelled of the stagnant odor of decay that filled the night—that the smell, and the oppression, were heavier because I had leaned nearer to him!

I looked—with a more intense gaze than I had yet turned on him—not at the face that bent above me now, the face that still eluded and baffled me—but down at the arm next me, at the sleeve of his cloak of heavy, black cloth. For something had caught my eye—something moved—oh, what was this horror, and why was it so horrible? —a slowly moving *worm* upon his sleeve?

I shuddered so that I clashed my teeth together. I must control myself.

And then, as though my deep alarm were the cue for the hidden event to advance from the future upon me, the car was gliding to a stop. I tore my horrified gaze from the black-clad arm, and looked out of the car. We were gliding *into a cemetery!*

"Not here! Oh, don't stop here!"

I gasped the words, as one gasps in a nightmare.

"Yes. Here."

The deep voice was deeper. It was deep and hollow. There was no comfort in it.

The mask was off my fear, at least. I was face to face with that, though I had not yet seen that other face.

I leaped from the car, and fell fainting beside it. Black, low-hung, and long, and narrow—I had been to but one funeral in my life, but I knew it now. It was the shape of a coffin!

After that, I had no hope. I was with a madman, or——

He dragged me—in gloved hands through which the hard, long fingers bruised my flesh—past graves, past tombstones and marble statues, and I was numb. I saw among the graves, or seemed to see—oh, let me say I saw strange things, for I have seen them since; and I was numb.

He dragged me toward an old, old, sunken grave headed by a time-stained stone that settled to one side, so long it had marked that spot. And suddenly the nightmare dreaminess that had dulled my senses gave way to some keener realization of the truth. I struggled, I fought back with all my little strength, till I tore the glove from his

right hand, and the finger of his right hand snapped in my grasp—snapped, and—gave way!

I struggled in the first faint rays of dawn, struggled as I felt the old, old, sunken earth give way beneath my feet. And the sun rose over the edge of the earth, and flamed red into my desperate eyes. I turned for a last time to the inscrutable face, and in those blood-red rays of the dawn I saw at last revealed —the grinning, fleshless jaws, the empty eye-sockets of——

Statement by the Superintendent of St. Margaret's Insane Asylum

THIS DOCUMENT was found in the room of Leonora ——, who was pronounced dead of heart-failure by the resident physician. Attendants who rushed to the room on hearing wild cries, and who found her dead, believe the fatal attack to have been caused by the excitement of writing down her extraordinary narration.

The doctor who had attended her considered her the victim of a strange form of auto-hypnosis. She undoubtedly disappeared from her home on the night of the eighteenth of March, and was found two days later in an old cemetery, three hundred miles away. When found, she was incoherent and hysterical, and *was holding in her hand the finger of a skeleton.* How and where she might have come by this, it was and is impossible to surmise.

It seems, however, that she must have been lured from her home by some stranger, and have escaped or been abandoned near the cemetery; that she must have read of the legend of Leonora, and that it must have made a morbid impression on her mind which later, following the shock which caused her to lose her reason, dictated the form her insanity was to take.

It is true that her skin, from the time of her discovery in the graveyard, had a peculiar appearance suggestive of the skin of a leprous person, or even more of that of a corpse; and (which she does not mention) it also exuded a peculiar odor.

These peculiar phenomena were among those attributed by the doctor to the effects of auto-hypnosis; his theory being that, just as a hypnotized person may be made to develop a burn on the arm by the mere suggestion without the application of heat, Leonora had suggested to herself that she had been contaminated by the touch of death, and that her physical nature had been affected by the strength of the suggestion.

THE host of admirers of the late Robert E. Howard's Conan stories in WEIRD TALES will be interested to learn that *The Hyborian Age* has been published in mimeograph form by Forrest J. Ackerman and the other editors of that excellent weird story "fan" magazine, *Imagination.* The copy that has reached the editor's desk informs us that the edition is limited to one hundred copies. The foreword is taken from *The Phœnix on the Sword* (the first of the Conan stories, which appeared in WEIRD TALES six years ago). A mournful touch is the inclusion of an introductory letter by the late H. P. Lovecraft, who last year followed Howard into the shadows. The booklet contains a full-page map, drawn by Howard himself, showing the different countries that were the scenes of Conan's weird adventures. A similar map has long been in possession of the editor of WEIRD TALES, who treasures it as one of his most valued possessions. The booklet ends with a resumé of the Conan sagas in chronological order of occurrence with the date in which each appeared in WEIRD TALES.

Some Magnificent Jewel

Warren J. Oswald writes from Fort William D. Davis, Canal Zone: "Please pardon the interruption, but I just had to get in my two cents' worth. I have just finished the August issue of WT, and think it's swellegant, to use an ancient phrase. I'm not, at the present time, in the tomato business, but I just can't resist the temptation to throw a few. Re Seabury Quinn's *The Venomed Breath of Vengeance;* it was a good story, but seemed rather prosaic for WT. On the other hand, every time Quinn goes off the beaten track (Jules de Grandin, to you) he picks up some magnificent jewel in the wastelands, polishes it up, and gives it to the readers in one splendid, coruscating, blinding flash. And, gee, do I love it! It just goes to show you what he can do. *The Globe of Memories* and *Roads* are among the more scintillating of these gems. . . . Other topics: The cover, for instance. Even though Mrs. Brundage's covers are artistic and striking, I would like very much to see a scene from a city of the future, or some like subject. Just for a change, you know. And when are we going to get another Northwest Smith tale? C. L. Moore has been altogether too silent lately. We haven't heard from this author since the story, *Quest of the Starstone.*"

A New Reader

Harry Warner, Jr., writes from Hagerstown, Maryland: "I'm a new reader of WEIRD TALES, having been getting it only for the last two issues, but I've been reading this type of story, and enjoyed it, for a long time, and so I was very much pleased when I finally found a place here in town where WT might be bought. The real thing, I think, that caused me to start buying it was *Dust in the House*—for whenever I see Doctor Keller's name I know that I will enjoy anything written by him. *Dust in the House* was, I think, the best thing in these two issues, followed very closely by Love-

craft's masterful short, *The Tree.* Clark Ashton Smith was of course masterful in *Mother of Toads,* but I definitely didn't like *Spawn of Dagon* or *The Fire Princess.* The former somehow didn't seem to belong in WT, and the latter would be much better as a movie serial for ten-year-olds. *The Black Drama* is my idea of what a weird story should be, and I only wish I hadn't missed the first part. Finlay is a fine artist, and the July cover wasn't too bad, but heaven forbid that we get any more like the August one! . . . Your poetry is uniformly good, except for *The Messenger* which stands out heads and shoulders above the rest, and I read the Eyrie before anything else. Keep up reprinting old stories and try to use more by Lovecraft and Howard, won't you? I think that they can be safely classed along with Poe, judging from what I've read of them. I have just one request to make—try to keep the magazine devoted exclusively to weird material. Science-fiction I enjoy tremendously, and a certain amount of it, as in *He that Hath Wings,* is all right, but when I buy WEIRD TALES I expect something weird, and nothing more like *Invaders from Outside,* although that story would have been perfectly all right in a science-fiction magazine."

A Gem of Sheer Fantasy

B. M. Reynolds writes from North Adams, Massachusetts: "Many thanks for printing that superb tale, *The Fire Princess,* by Edmond Hamilton. His work seems finer than ever of late. This new novel from his pen is a veritable gem of sheer fantasy, comparing favorably with his *Child of the Winds, Lake of Life* and *Isle of the Sleeper.* More power to you, Mr. Hamilton; may your work appear often in our magazine. *A Thunder of Trumpets,* by Robert E. Howard and his co-author is, likewise, a splendid contribution, well-written and compelling throughout. The character Ranjit embodies within himself the mysticism and witchery of the real India, which ever lurks brooding behind its civilized sham, to a greater degree than any other fiction character I have ever contacted. Other yarns of note were: *The Cavern, A Witch's Curse* and *The White Rat.*"

Replete with Spooky Legends

Osmond Robb writes from Edinburgh, Scotland: "Just a short appreciation of your magazine, which has given me many hours of delightfully blood-curdling enjoyment. My first acquaintance with the work of your star authors was made not through the medium of WT itself but via the famous *Not at Night* series of carefully selected reprint shockers, published in England, many of which were from your magazine. Eli Colter—Seabury Quinn—H. P. Lovecraft—these names were strange to me when I encountered them in the pages of the little red books with the gruesome titles, *By Daylight Only, Not at Night, Grim Death,* etc. I must confess that then, as now, the unvarnished blood-and-thunders which sought to revolt the reader by nauseous details of putrefaction and slimy abomination left me cold. I wanted other-worldly horror, the chill dread of what may lie beyond the farthest outposts of our cognizance, not the cheap revulsion of rotting cadavers. This eery, authentic thrill the late lamented H. P. L. provided, and the first story I ever read by this exquisite literary craftsman established me as one of his fans. *The Horror at Red Hook,* with its muttering crones, its vile incantations and its final glimpse into the shadows of an all-too-realistic inferno sent shivers up and down my spine. Since that date I have never been disappointed by a Lovecraft story. Your magazine today is well-nigh perfect. . . . Congratulations to Gertrude Hemken on her consistently amusing monthly letter; the slang she uses is so richly expressive that it recalls Elizabethan times. In this age of polite, stereotyped literary styles it is refreshing to find somebody who can invent words and phrases as she goes along. I imagine Drury would make an A-1 correspondence-friend. I will close with an invitation to your authors. Why not read up the folklore of my home town, Edinburgh? I assure you it is replete with spooky legends that could be worked into shivery stories. 'Nuff said."

From a Loyal Reader

Caroline Ferber writes from Chicago: "Finlay's *Israfel* is most startling with the blue—and the 'giddy stars' radiate like 4th of July sparklers. Most unusual to me—it calls for further study and more study. The title *As 'Twas Told to Me* is really intriguing—and Quinn's name, coupled with the drawing of that cavalier, are enough to make one want to dig into the yarn. Boy, did I ever feel I was Mary Popham being tried for witchcraft! Brrr—and grrr— such ignorance of a pioneering people! Blackwood's *Magic Mirror* evidently does not deal with 'The Man Who Broke the Bank'—Poor feller—aren't the best of us prone to gamble deeply at times? Sorta liked Tooke's verse, *The Wreck*. Scientifically, *The White Rat* was good reading—but rat tales get me down. Better—much better—I liked *A Thunder of Trumpets*—this tale of a Hindoo—a Yogi—and the dazzling heights his mind traverses—as a matter of fact, it's beautiful and fascinating, as was the handsome Ranjit. Tusk—tusk—Robert Bloch has almost a C. A. Smith quality in his—*Mandarin's Canaries*—such subtle torture! Woo—The Fire Princess, she is either very brave, or very foolish—but what exciting fun it is to read! Like an old-time movie serial, we would be kept in suspense as to the outcome of the visit into the bowels of the earth to seek the Place of Power. Passively I wait for the next issue. . . . Your short tales are all mighty fine—making up an excellent issue. Wellman's *The Cavern* had an amusing note even though it brought about the end of a daring explorer and adventurer—and how true it is!—a hippo really has a cavernous orifice in its head. . . . Paul Ernst's reprint of *A Witch's Curse* fits in a bit with the front cover. It's more intense than some of Ernst's recent attempts. I'd like to see him do something real good again—something that won't make one feel flat in the end. Glad to read that New Zealanders enjoy my monthly nonsense. B. A. Dwyer's suggestion of a de Grandin film meets with my approval—but I can't see Menjou as the friendly Jules. Have no particular one in

NEXT MONTH

MORE LIVES THAN ONE

By Seabury Quinn

HERE is an unusual weird story that skips through the years and ends at last in the United States at the present day. Those of you who enjoyed reading the same author's story, "The Globe of Memories" (and your names are legion, as "The Globe of Memories" was one of the most popular stories ever published in WEIRD TALES) will thoroughly enjoy this tale on a somewhat similar theme.

BEGINNING in the Netherlands under the Spanish occupation, the story takes the reader into the home of the rich burgher Pieter van Werff, whose son is shortly to be married to Lysbeth van de Doren, and shows us how that heroic girl accepted shame and disgrace to save those she loved, only to be betrayed by them. Through several lives runs the story, until the young van Werff at last gets the chance to atone for his treachery. This romantic and fascinating novelette will be published complete.

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mind, though. Too—I'd like a yarn of the 'iron and heroic North'—tales of Vikings and *die Walkure*—tall blond men and tall fair women. Gimme—and will I love it!"

Truant Illustrations

Misti Selkirk writes from La Oroya, Peru: "Imagine a splendid banquet, the tables loaded down with a countless variety of the most delicious viands, meats and pottages in endless array, fruits and cakes and sweets in profusion, what a feast for the eye! But imagine those steaming roasts, those heaping platters, without one grain of salt, those cakes, those jellies, those alluring desserts, entirely devoid of sugar, without one so small drop of flavoring essence, those green mountains of salad deprived of the last tiny drop of life-giving vinegar; certainly filling, nourishing beyond doubt, but lacking that piquant something beyond mere food that gives us the feeling of having truly dined. The feast without flavor was the August issue of our Magazine without the illustrations which have come to be so much a part of our monthly expectation. May I be one of the thousands who will petition for the printing of those truant illustrations, better late than never, in another issue? The tales in the August number were, as always, beyond comparison in their class. We do not censure the rice and duck from which is made our *arroz con pato* simply because the cook neglected that dash of *aji* which adds so much to our delight in the feast. Though slightly less than 'tops,' our meal was still miles above, over, and beyond the *frijoles, yuca, y papas* of our everyday diet. In his *Wolf-Girl of Josselin,* Arlton Eadie quotes his character as saying, '——and in addition we find variants of the legend (that of the werewolf) in Asia, India, Africa, and South America.' Perhaps Mr. Eadie may have known, as have I not long since, that strange alloy of incredulity and of horror that comes of seeing two crouching human figures slinking, under the leprous light of the rising moon, down into the ghostly white confines of a rocky defile, from which, seconds later, gallop two Things, four-footed, hairy and silent. But, indeed, had Mr. Eadie stood with me that night, scant five weeks ago, upon that slope above the tombs of Tarmatambo and seen what then I saw, who knows he might not speak now of 'legend'? Seabury Quinn gives us a slightly different version of the poison-accustomed Nemesis in his *Venomed Breath of Vengeance.* A dramatic tale, no doubt, but I was constrained to laughter by imagining his nitrobenzol-swilling Sepoy as coming off second best in a contest with one of us garlic-guzzling Spigs. Edmond Hamilton, in his latest serial, *The Fire Princess,* seems keeping to the same high level of excellence to which he has elevated his recent tales. If, now, he can but avoid the conflict between 'the band with the red trappings and that with the black,' then may he at last have reached the standard of the immortals of weird fiction. The culmination of *The Black Drama* was everything which the superb introductory chapters led us to expect. Please convey my congratulations to Mr. Field for a masterful piece of plot-building. May your years be as those of the walls of Ollantaytambo, Mr. Field, and may you give us each year at least one more of your tales. *Dead Dog* and *Three Gentlemen in Black* are expressions of the conventional ghost story which yet achieve something beyond mere convention, something almost belief-compelling. That touch, by which the third Gentleman in Black is made to be the figure turning into the lane, that is the hairline that divides between an ordinary spook yarn and an imaginative masterpiece. Mr. Derleth has long compelled my silent admiration; may this be the breaking of that silence. Of course, anything I can say regarding *The Tree* can be but as the comments of the guttering candle upon the setting of the magnificent sun."

Most Popular Story

Readers, what is your favorite story in this issue? As we go to press, two stories are in a tie for popular favor in the September issue, as shown by your votes and letters. These are Seabury Quinn's tale of Salem witchcraft, *As 'Twas Told to Me;* and the biological thrill-tale written by Earl Peirce and Bruce Bryan, *The White Rat.*

COMING NEXT MONTH

THE GREAT CHAPEL, circular in shape, had walls that rose curving, darkly luminous, satin-smooth as the petals of a vast black tulip, to meet a vaulted roof—their polished surface broken by squat archways behind which darkness lay like a crouching beast of prey.

Above the huge slab of the altar-stone was a reredos of red alabaster, a screen some thirty feet by ten. It was powerfully illumined from behind, so that its carving stood out in bold relief and a trick in the lighting gave a sinister effect of constant movement.

This screen was a vivid presentment of a human sacrifice. Bound on the stone altar, a woman appeared to writhe and quiver. Her long bright hair rippled down to a deep trough about the altar-base. About the altar stood tall candles whose flames danced in frenzy. And behind the candles' flare and flicker, at each of the four corners of the altar, a veiled figure towered. Menacing, gigantic, these figures were the only immovable objects on the screen, and they achieved by their fateful stillness—in contrast with the surge and movement of all else in the picture—an effect of final inescapable doom. Dark crescent moons poised above each veiled head of these four attendant genii, bearing Hebrew characters which read—EARTH. WINTER. NIGHT. DEATH.

And now Sant saw the black-clad figure—the body of Stephen Lynn, torn and wrenched, trembling from head to foot in diabolic ecstasy, arms flung wide, head bent backward so that light from the suspended globe beat full and fiercely down upon the upturned face. Louder—louder rang the great triumphant organ voice, pealing out into the unclean silence of the chapel's gloom, beating against the curved and shining walls which sent back clashing pæans of tremendous harmony. . . .

You cannot afford to miss this strange and powerful tale of possession and dual personality, by the author of *Thing of Darkness*. This fascinating novelette will be published complete in the December issue of WEIRD TALES:

THE SIN-EATER

By G. G. Pendarves

—Also—

MORE LIVES THAN ONE

By SEABURY QUINN

An unusual weird story that skips through the ages and ends at last in present-day New York—a romantic and fascinating novelette.

BEETLES

By ROBERT BLOCH

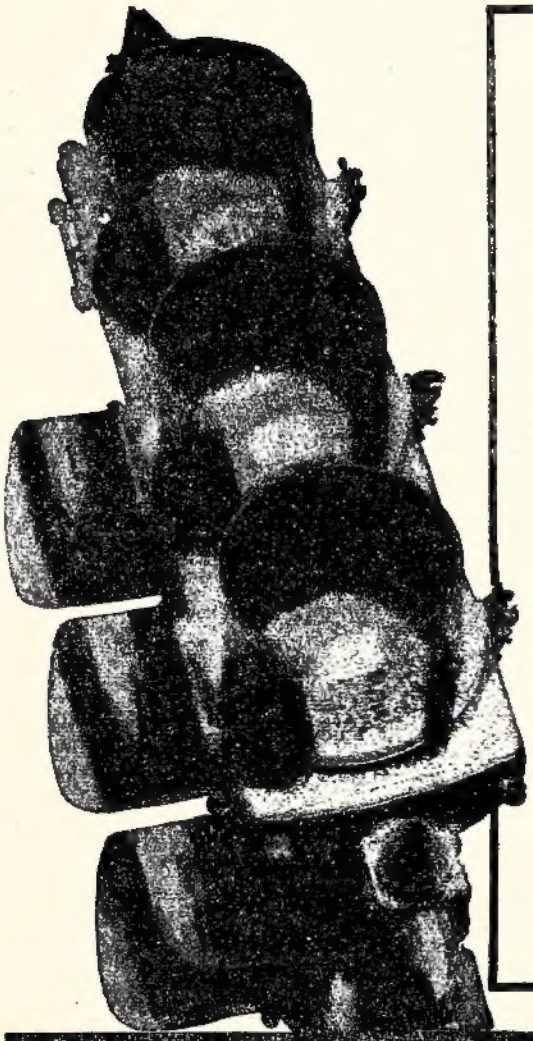
A tale of the ghastly fate that befell an archeologist who had stolen an Egyptian mummy protected by the sacred Scarab.

THE SNOWMAN

By LORETTA BURROUGH

Her first husband lay at the bottom of a deep crevasse in a Swiss glacier—but why should a snow image in his likeness strike her with such eery terror?

December Issue Weird Tales . . . . Out November 1



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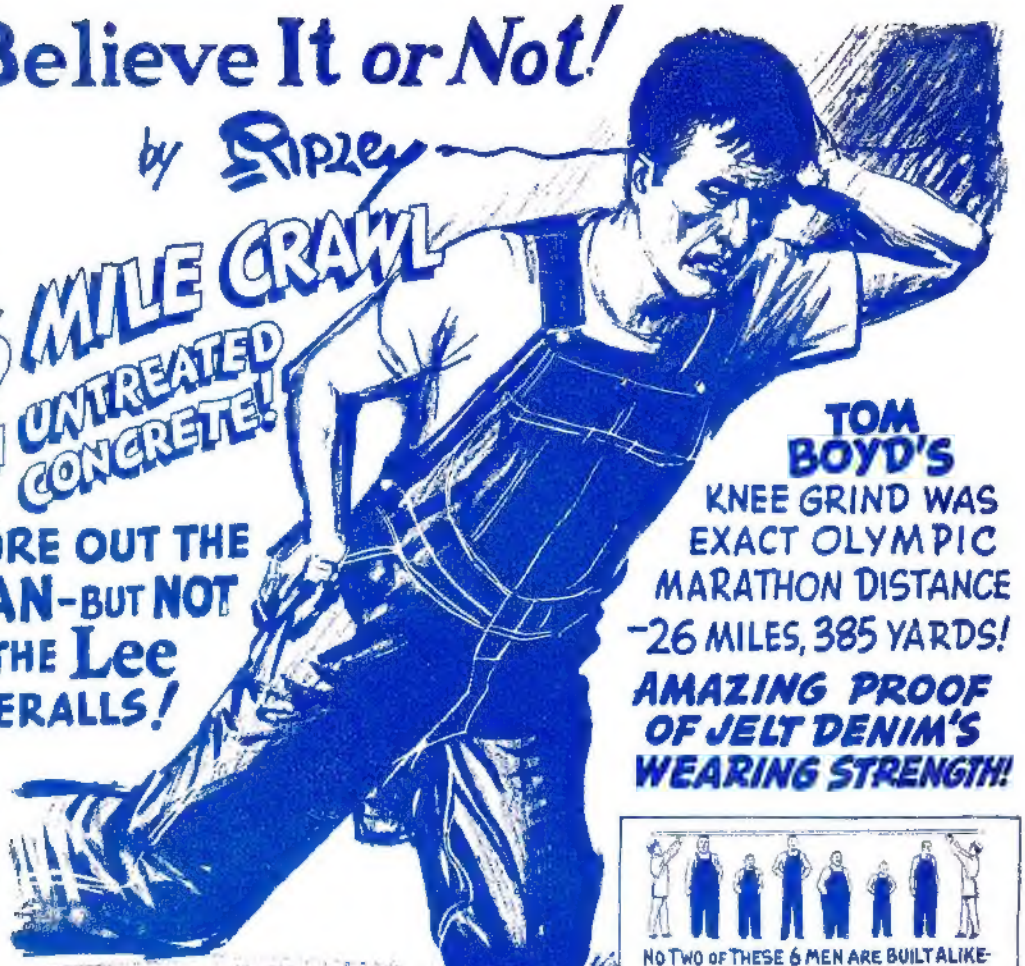
by Ripley



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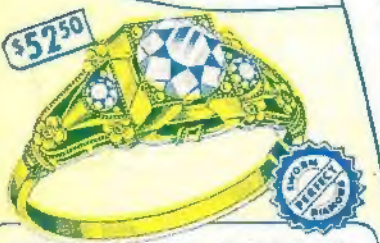

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